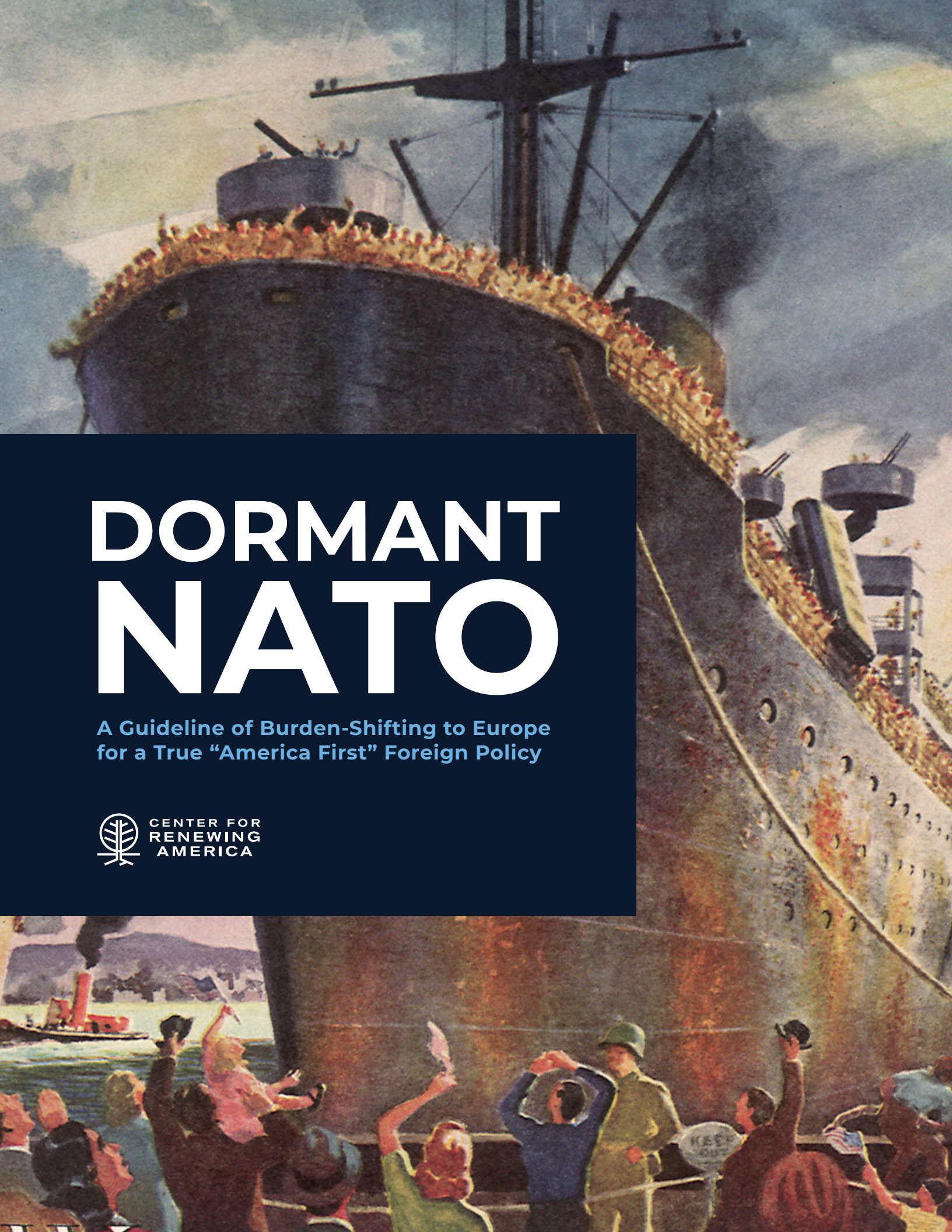

DORMANT NATO

A Guideline of Burden-Shifting to Europe for a True "America First" Foreign Policy

CENTER FOR RENEWING AMERICA

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A Note to the Reader

This booklet proposing a Dormant NATO is a compilation and summation of the doctrine, which I have written about in various outlets, most importantly the Center for Renewing America (CRA).

The core thesis of the doctrine was published in three different policy briefs on the CRA website and an essay in *Foreign Affairs*. The history section of this booklet is taken from my PhD research on NATO, which was published as a book in 2024.

This booklet is intended to consolidate all that I have written on Dormant NATO and serve as a singular contribution both for policymakers to provide a guideline on what an America First foreign policy in Europe would entail and for general practitioners and casual readers who are interested in NATO, foreign policy, and history.

Some thematic and textual similarity will be evident to those who have read the previously published original research.

Realism, Restraint, and the Republic

What should a realist American grand strategy in Europe look like? This is an enormous question, with implications far beyond academic debates. Great powers collapse due to overstretch and insolvency. They cease to exist due to great power wars: They are often dragged to a total war with a rival great power by errant and reckless protectorates.

The primary causes of the collapse of America, heaven forbid it should occur in our lifetime, will also be primarily attributed by future historians to overstretch, insolvency, or great power wars. It is our job as historians and policy analysts to delay that contingency. Accordingly, this short booklet explains a strategic doctrine now widely known as Dormant NATO.[1] It argues for a new approach for American policymakers to pursue in Europe, which would keep the United States tied to the continent while reducing its current, lopsided security burden. It explains the recent history of NATO, the causal logic behind NATO enlargement and how that growth affected its performance, and the process by which the United States became the indispensable power on a continent that by any measure is the richest in human history. It then proceeds to suggest an alternative strategic doctrine and organizational framework for American grand strategy and theater prioritization in the European continent.

Dormant NATO is predicated on four fundamental assumptions: that the continued expansion of NATO is a case of ideology over interests, that the structural forces dictate an eventual prioritization towards Asia over Europe, and that Western Europe wants to "buck-pass" its security burden to America while Eastern Europe wants to chain-gang America into local wars; and that Europe as a whole has no coherent strategic interest, and therefore there is no coherent actor to provide comprehensive security in Europe except America as an offshore balancer. This is in itself an American advantage, especially as it faces a potential rivalry with China.

Accordingly, the doctrine suggests a few

1. Most of the core contentions of this booklet have been published before in three separate briefs, which form the bulk of this booklet. See Sumantra Maitra, "Policy Brief: Seeking Equilibrium in East Europe: Burden Shifting in the Baltics," Center for Renewing America, September 15, 2022, https://americarenewing.com/policy-brief-seeking-equilibrium-in-east-europe-burden-shifting-in-the-baltics/; Maitra, "Policy Brief: Pivoting the US Away from Europe to a Dormant NATO," Center for Renewing America, February 16, 2023, https://americarenewing.com/policy-brief-pivoting-the-us-away-from-europe-to-a-dormant-nato/; and Maitra, "Out of Shape and Out of Control: Understanding and Reforming a 'Woke' NATO," Center for Renewing America, February 7, 2025, https://americarenewing.com/issues/out-of-shape-and-out-of-control-understanding-and-reforming-a-woke-nato/.

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significant policy shifts. First, the key American interest is to continue to provide a nuclear umbrella and peace in Europe while *shifting* the burden of logistics, infantry, armor, and intelligence to European coordination and command. The focus must be burden-shifting instead of burden-sharing, which has failed both rhetorically and materially. Second, all NATO expansion and promises of expansion must stop so that it can coalesce as a closed, coherent unit with a finite set of defensible geostrategic interests. Third, the supranational NATO bureaucracy must be curtailed because of its zeal for extraterritorial operations and socially progressive politics. NATO should be reshaped as a strictly defensive alliance, as originally intended.

Dormancy of NATO would not mean a total retrenchment from Europe or a repudiation of NATO as an alliance. Nor would it be a dilution of NATO's promises and treaty guarantees. It can be thought of as the restoration of a reactive rather than active character to the alliance. A defensive alliance should be restfully asleep until there is a threat to the territorial integrity of its members.

There are four steps to making NATO dormant. First, NATO would stop all expansion and talks of expansion. NATO's borders should be finite; it should be thought of as a club, in which states are either in or out. NATO must end all discussion and drafting of accession plans for Georgia and Ukraine.

A second step would require the United States to cease all funding of and participation in the bloated civilian NATO bureaucracy, with the expectation that NATO would eliminate anything that is not essential to basic European defense. There should be no official platform about LGBT rights or support for social nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are often based in the United States but act as the global arm of a supranational liberal internationalist establishment. NATO would cut costs and cease major antagonistic military exercises, especially in the Black Sea, since it is a defensive alliance whose purpose is not to provoke rival great powers. Finally, there would be no further out-of-area NATO operations, whether in North Africa, the Middle East, or the Pacific.

NATO's enlargement was not inevitable. It was a policy decision made at the height of unipolarity. It resulted in two consequences. The United States was an unnatural glue to keep the European peace intact, so NATO's enlargement led to an atrophy of military power among rich Western European states and their free-riding on the United States. Simultaneously, the Eastern European states wanted to draw the United States into their ethnic rivalries and chain-gang the United States to their peripheral conflicts. Both of those instincts make sense from the perspective of the protectorates. But they have been disastrous for the United States, as they have led to overstretch and near insolvency.

This booklet therefore articulates a simple burden-shifting posture, where logistics would be strictly European in both com-

mand and contribution, alongside infantry, artillery, and armor. Only naval power and the nuclear umbrella would be in the hands of the Americans. The reasoning goes like this: A burden-shifting in certain domains would result in burden-sharing overall and would slow the rising tides of populism on this side of the Atlantic.

It would also help solve Europe's internal balancing problem by forcing the Europeans to rearm at a faster pace than they would prefer. Finally, it would keep the United States tied to continental interests such as discouraging nuclear proliferation and deterring an external hegemonic threat when needed without resulting in a hegemonic overstretch, insolvency, and collapse.

The role of the United States would be that of an offshore balancer, not dissimilar to that of Britain from 1815 to 1914. This kind of rational and logical compromise posture would restrain extreme voices on both sides. Dormant NATO is not a policy to promote total U.S. disengagement from the continent with which it shares kinship, culture, and strategic unity. The United States shares civilizational ties with Europe, and it is a State Department guideline to look for civilizational allies in the continent.[2] There is no better posture towards that end than Dormant NATO.

The next portion of this booklet explains the changes to NATO immediately after the Cold War and describes why those developments have led to a permanent state of hostility between the United States and Russia. It then lays out the core logic of Dormant NATO and finally provides some guidelines about a European posture in a Dormant NATO scenario. It concludes with an idea of proclamations of neutrality, a strategy that helped the United States immensely in its rise as a hegemon during the early republic.

2. U.S. Department of State, "The Need for Civilizational Allies in Europe," Substack, May 27, 2025, https://statedept.substack.com/p/the-need-for-civilizational-allies-in-europe.

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A Short History of the Debate About NATO Expansion

In the heady days immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the leaders of European states convened in London to deliberate on a new era. They planned a NATO that would transition away from "forward defense." When you look in the archive, the backchannel discussions are, as usual, more captivating than the public ones. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and French President François Mitterand, concerned about the potential reunification of Germany and the reemergence of the "German question" (a unified Germany as a hegemonic power at the heart of Europe), proposed to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev that in exchange for Soviet support for German unification the Russians would be assured of their security.[1] The Americans and the British treated the Russians with even greater leniency. James Baker's pledge that NATO would advance "not one inch" was subsequently endorsed by President George H. W. Bush and British Prime Minister John Major. The latter also assured Soviet Marshal Dmitri Yazov that NATO would not be enlarged.

As the adage goes, the rest is history. The West currently argues that it gave no written pledge guaranteeing no eastward expansion and that any promises that were made were made to an entity (the USSR) that has since ceased to exist. The commitments were rendered moot in the years that followed the dissolution of the USSR. The Russians, however, regard this expansion as a betrayal. Russian interventions in Georgia, Crimea, Syria, and Ukraine, as well as President Vladimir Putin's wrath at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, have all been attributed to a revanchist Russia that drew lessons from this perceived betrayal.

The expansion of NATO has been dubbed by George Kennan the "most fateful error of American policy in the entire post–Cold War era."[2] What is the reason for the most perilous period in the annals of the United States and Russia since the end of the Cold War? It has been examined through the prism of domestic politics in Russia, authoritarianism, Christian conservatism, fascism, neo-imperialism, and many other perspectives.[3] Despite the difficulty of obtaining archival data from within the Kremlin for a thorough historical investigation, a meticulous examination of Rus-

1. Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," National Security Archive Briefing Book No. 613, December 12, 2017, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early.
2. Eugene J. Carroll Jr., "NATO Expansion Would Be an Epic 'Fateful Error,'" *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 1997, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-jul-07-me-10464-story.html.
3. Sumantra Maitra, *The Sources of Russian Aggression* (Lexington Books, 2024).

sian responses to NATO's enlargement illuminates the reasons why the expansion of NATO has been the single most significant act of recent Western grand strategy. It is a strategy whose repercussions are still being felt today, and it is one of the primary causal variables behind Russian revanchism.

The periods of Russian reactions to the numerous phases of NATO's enlargement are described in my book *The Sources of Russian Aggression*.[4] In brief, the Soviets' attempt to establish a successor to the Warsaw Pact was unsuccessful by 1990, and Moscow expressed a desire to become a member of NATO by 1991, as the initial indications of NATO's expansion were being suggested. In 1992, Manfred Wörner declared that NATO's doors were open.[5] The first international case for expansion was made by German Defense Minister Volker Rühe, who stated unequivocally that German stability would be permanently compromised if her eastern frontiers were not moved.[6] This was succeeded by a Central and Eastern European debate before the Clinton administration, during which democratic peace theorists, who proposed that U.S. security is guaranteed by a consistent promotion of democracies, prevailed over Cold War–era realists, who favored equilibrium.[7] Even as U.S. troops were withdrawing from Europe as a consequence of a post–Cold War drawdown, Madeleine Albright (a Central European herself) and Jeremy Rosner urged Clinton to open NATO's doors.

Initially, Russia lacked the power, background, and interest to oppose the expansion of NATO, even if it was dissatisfied with its outcomes. Both Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin believed that NATO could offer some stability over a unified Germany and Central Europe, thereby preventing Germany from pursuing hegemony once more. Russian intelligence services referred to NATO as the "largest grouping with enormous offensive potential," and Russian military and strategic circles began to plan "partnerships and cooperations." But they were content with the idea that NATO would not expand until 1994. In the Duma, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev proclaimed that the most significant accomplishment of post-Soviet diplomacy was halting the expansion of NATO.[8]

It goes without saying that this view did not last. Yeltsin declared that the Cold War had been superseded by the Cold Peace immediately following the initial phase of expansion. Russian diplomats told Western ones that Russia was feeling betrayed. But structural forces prevented Russia from taking any action. The pro-Western Russian legislators who lost power and never recovered were the greatest losers in Russian internal politics.

4. Maitra, *Sources of Russian Aggression*.
5. Quoted in *Defense News*, April 29, 1991, cited in Gerald B. Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997* (Praeger, 1998): 8.
6. George W. Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows: NATO Marches East* (University Press of America, 1998).
7. See Douglas Brinkley, "Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine," *Foreign Policy* 106 (Spring 1997): 110–27, http://jstor.org/stable/1149177, and Ronald D. Asmus, Richard L. Kugler, and F. Stephen Larrabee, "Building a New NATO, *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 4 (September–October 1993): 28–40, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/southeastern-europe/1993-09-01/building-new-nato.
8. James Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

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Yevgeny Primakov, the director of foreign intelligence, expressed his belief that Russia would inevitably be compelled to implement military measures by the end of 1995.[9] This rang alarm bells in the West, as Western political circles were still populated by career diplomats who had memories of the Cold War. The West promptly tried to appease Russia by proposing concessions such as a NATO–Russia partnership for peace and a substantial reduction of American troops from Europe.

The total number of personnel in the American forward presence decreased from 330,000 to approximately one hundred. The simultaneous reduction of approximately 40 percent of land, sea, and aviation units occurred in response to the inclusion of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in NATO. The reduction of nuclear weapons at the theater level was nearly 80 percent. The Russian foreign ministry stipulated that enlargement could proceed if there were "no deployments of nuclear weapons or allied combat forces on the territory of new member states."

NATO and the United States promptly agreed to these conditions. European politics favored a NATO–Russia detente. The Dayton Accords were effectively endorsed by NATO's adoption of Russian conditions, which occurred at the same time that Russia was invited to join the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia. In 1997, the NATO Russia Founding Act was signed, which established a new Russian "red line" that prohibited NATO forces from stationing themselves in former Soviet countries, including the Baltics. The second phase of NATO enlargement and the war in Kosovo shattered Atlanticist illusions and Russian democracy.

The Kosovo War is frequently cited in Russian military periodicals as a turning point, and while history rarely presents a classic turning point, it could be considered one. The war was a turning point in international relations, as it transitioned NATO from a defensive organization to an ideologically globalist organization and ushered in an era of supranational interventions and humanitarian wars. Until that point, domestic law and order were deemed an issue. Afterward, that was no longer the case.

This transformation was reflected in Russian military doctrine. Russian planners initiated the development of scenarios for a potential resumption of hostilities with NATO for the first time since the conclusion of the Cold War. Russia abandoned its "no first use" policy, adapting its nuclear doctrine and making clear its precarious conventional insecurity. A single sentence comprised the new doctrine: Russia may be compelled to employ nuclear weapons in the event of a hazard to its existence, such

9. Yevgenii Primakov, "Perspektivy Rasshireniia NATO i Interesy Rossii [Perspectives on NATO Expansion and the Interests of Russia]," *Izvestiia* (November 26, 1993), cited in Kimberly Marten, "Reconsidering NATO Expansion: A Counterfactual Analysis of Russia and the West in the 1990s," *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 2 (2018): 135–61, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-international-security/article/reconsidering-nato-expansion-a-counterfactual-analysis-of-russia-and-the-west-in-the-1990s/356448EA9D5C63C53BE1EC6B33FE470A.

as a foreign-funded revolution.

The implications were stark. The NATO–Russia joint council disbanded due to the conflict in Kosovo. For the first time in history, NATO deployed permanent soldiers east of Germany in Poland, crossing another Russian red line. This action prompted Igor Sergeyev to express his concern that it would reignite active military competition. At the end of 1999, a short, youthful, polite, somewhat awkward and skinny former intelligence officer, Vladimir Putin, was elected the new president of Russia.

In his meeting with NATO's Secretary General George Robertson, Putin acknowledged NATO's enlargement under Yeltsin as a fait accompli and expressed his desire to reestablish a dialogue between Russia and NATO.[10] In early 2001, he also said that Moscow would be open to the establishment of a joint missile defense shield over Europe between Washington and Moscow. Then came the 9/11 attacks. At the time, Russia was experiencing an insurgency in Chechnya that began as a secular struggle for nationalism but evolved into an Islamist movement, a phenomenon that was prevalent during the Arab Spring. Putin, however, was afforded an opportunity to reconcile with the United States after the 9/11 assaults.

Russia offered the United States assistance in the form of bases in Central Asia and intelligence on Afghanistan—potentially. Putin said that Russia would be delighted to participate in such processes if NATO would transition into a political organization that prioritizes democracy. This statement was particularly fateful. When the United States withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in December 2001, the Russians characterized this decision as an error and proceeded with their affairs. NATO did transition into a political organization that prioritized democratic peace theory.

The 9/11 attacks transformed the organization into one that regarded the active promotion of democracy as its *raison d'être*. President George W. Bush said during the 2002 Prague summit, "We see this already in Afghanistan—for forces from Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia and others have joined with 16 NATO allies to help defeat global terror."[11]

NATO's most pressing obligation was to advance democracy, even through military means, rather than to safeguard Western and Central Europe from hegemonic threats. The Russians were unaware of the transformation. Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said in a 2002 interview that "Russia no longer regards NATO enlargement as a threat, as the alliance has undergone a significant transformation from a Cold War instrument to a defense against global terrorism and other 21st-century threats."[12]

10. The Kremlin, Moscow, "Acting President Vladimir Putin Met with NATO Secretary-General George Robertson," President of Russia, news release, February 16, 2000, http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/37942.
11. George W. Bush, remarks, Atlantic Student Summit, Prague, Czech Republic, November 20, 2002, https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021120f.htm.
12. Igor Ivanov, "Kremlin Enjoys the Fruits of Its Foreign Policy," interview by Michael Binyon, *Times* (UK), November 21, 2002.

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Political speeches underscored that Russia did not consider NATO a threat but rather a partner in the fight against Islamic terrorism. Russian military doctrine remained unaltered. The Iraq War did not completely disintegrate NATO–Russia relations, despite the fact that the Russian general staff was making noises about the necessity of multipolarity in global affairs after the war.

Nevertheless, the Color Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia dashed all aspirations for a complete reconciliation between Russia and NATO. The shift in perception was evident in Russia's political statements and military doctrines. Putin issued a warning that Ukraine and Georgia were "red lines" for Russia as these countries' requests for NATO membership intensified. During this time, NATO was already providing Poland with communications and logistics. NATO F-16 patrols were conducted over the Baltic Sea in 2004 for the first time since the Cold War, and powerful missiles were installed in Turkish territory.

The West disregarded Moscow's requests for any discussion regarding conventional forces, and significant protests were organized in Georgia and Ukraine, with funding from USAID and other NGOs. In 2006, Sergey Lavrov issued the first warning that any action taken by Ukraine and Georgia toward NATO would result in a "colossal geopolitical shift."[13] Russian military journals began to suggest that it would be shortsighted for Russia to disregard the possibility that NATO's extension could be essential to the United States' pursuit of unipolarity. Finally, Putin said at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 that the expansion of NATO is not associated with the modernization of the alliance or the security of Europe.[14]

Putin accused the United States of being a hyperpower that disregards treaties and norms: "[Wörner] stated at the time that the Soviet Union is guaranteed a firm security guarantee by the fact that we are prepared to refrain from deploying a NATO army outside of German territory. Where are these guarantees?" The United States had proposed to establish missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic, and Russia declared that it regarded the possibility of this substantial permanent weapons system to be a "clear threat." Putin issued a warning after the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest: "We regard the establishment of a robust military bloc on our borders as a direct threat to the security of our own country."

Within a year after Georgia attacked the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian military forces were engaged in offensive combat outside their nation for the first time in decades within a year. Russia maintained that these campaigns were qualitatively equivalent to NATO's invasion of Kosovo and were

13. Nick Paton Walsh, "Russia Tells Ukraine to Stay Out of NATO," *Guardian*, June 7, 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jun/08/russia.nickpatonwalsh.
14. Vladimir Putin, speech, Munich Conference, February 10, 2007, https://www.securityconference.de/en/about/munich-moments/a-breeze-of-cold-war/.

humanitarian conflicts waged to protect the Russian-speaking population of the two provinces.

Relations were never the same. Russia continued to accuse the United States of continuing to actively impose its values on the rest of the world, using all available force and assets. According to Russia, the use of social media platforms during the Arab Spring in 2011 was yet another instance of American intelligence warfare.

After the 2008 conflict, the expansion of NATO was identified as the greatest threat to the integrity of Russia in all Russian military doctrinal papers. Despite the fact that President Barack Obama attempted a “reset,” his administration was one of the most ideological and activist in history. This included the American ambassador in Moscow publicly supporting protests against the Russian government, American politicians participating in the Maidan protests in Ukraine in 2014, the toppling of pro-Russian leaders in the Middle East, intervention in Libya, the proxy war in Syria, and USAID’s involvement in Ukraine.

When Finland, Sweden, Macedonia, and Montenegro joined NATO, Russia refrained from initiating military action. That action transpired when Ukraine and Georgia intended to join NATO. The reason for this discrepancy is that the former did not jeopardize Russia’s fundamental strategic and geographical interests, while the latter did. Contributing factors included NATO’s actions being perceived as threatening, the proximity of the conflict zones, Russia’s increasing strength, Moscow’s feelings of deception, and lost opportunities for collaboration after 9/11. Moscow perceived NATO’s actions—including redeploying forces, patrolling the Baltics, conducting exercises with new members, and offering membership to Ukraine and Georgia—as aggressions by a global superpower that was encroaching on its influence. Despite these views, a substantial agreement could have been reached between Russia and NATO.

Russia’s leaders concluded that military measures are the sole prerequisite for any future equilibrium following Atlanticist delusions. As we will see in the subsequent chapters, NATO also deviated from its fundamental function of safeguarding shared Euro-Atlantic values against Soviet threats. In 2017, NATO’s leaders advocated for LGBT inclusion, and in 2021, NATO conducted its inaugural LGBTQ+ workplace perspectives event. It currently addresses a variety of topics, including the restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights of members, gender-based violence in conflict zones, abortion, human rights in Libya, and climate change.

Ideological institutions must either expand or experience a decline. The United States’ global influence and support are diminished by NATO’s expansion into these regions. In order to reorient itself as a defense-oriented, streamlined alliance, NATO must significantly reduce its ideological pursuits. Finally, the United States must suspend NATO’s expansion.

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In addition to deteriorating relations with Russia, this expansion has resulted in the formation of an organization whose actions frequently conflict with the autonomy of member states and the fundamental interests of the United States. It has enabled affluent European nations to transfer defense expenses to the United States while simultaneously advocating for idealistic global principles. Contrary to the 1990s’ expectations of European self-reliance, a more expansive NATO empowers minor states and draws the United States into local conflicts.

NATO’s expansion has also led to a significant increase in debt and a strain on U.S. resources. History has demonstrated that great powers can be as easily undermined by overreach as they are by conflict. The United States is shouldering an inordinately heavy burden because of NATO’s current form. An agreement with Russia and a more defensive and compact NATO could enable Washington to prioritize growing threats in Asia.

Woke NATO

Peter Hitchens wrote in 2001 that NATO and the EU had morphed into a smiley-badge version of the old USSR."[1] That statement is even truer today than it was then. NATO released a strategy document in June 2022, just a few months after Russia invaded Ukraine, that for the first time identified China as a strategic threat. This was concurrent with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan and Chinese military exercises. The document asserted that "the People's Republic of China's (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values."

The strategy document delineated NATO's fundamental responsibilities as "deterrence and defense; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security." NATO's nuclear capability is intended to "preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression."

The remainder of the strategy document deviated from coherence, however, asserting that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a fundamental violation of the norms and principles of a stable European order and that "Moscow's behavior reflects a pattern of Russian aggressive actions against its neighbors and the wider transatlantic community."

Given Russia's performance in eastern Ukraine, there is currently no evidence to suggest that it has the will or capability to initiate an expansionist campaign in the rest of Europe. It is unclear how a peripheral war in the far eastern reaches of Europe would impact core American strategic interests despite the fact that the invasion violates a weak norm against state-versus-state war over territory.

The document also indicated that the alliance is confronted with "persistent threat(s) of terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations." The alliance's interests and values are being challenged by pervasive instability, rising strategic competition, and advancing authoritarianism. Nevertheless, NATO was not intended to deter nonstate actors, and the majority of European terrorism is the result of unregulated migration from Africa or elements that are already residing within the European Union. These are issues that NATO is both legally and structurally unsuited to address. NATO's claim that "advancing authoritarianism" poses a threat to the alliance raises several significant questions. Who has the authority to establish the definition of "authoritarianism"? The alliance now seems to be interested in policing within its borders against its own citizens for the threat of authoritarianism in an era where any deviation from politically liberal internationalism is considered authoritarian by some. But what measures is it willing to take to confront this vaguely defined threat? Lastly, NATO contends that climate change is a defining threat of our era, a crisis that exacerbates security threats by increasing instability. But what does it plan to do about it?

It is quite clear that the current version of NATO is unsuitable for its primary task of serving as a defensive alliance in Europe. Instead, NATO has become a bureaucratic organization preoccupied with its own development and sustenance: an alliance that requires an adversary. In comparison to the Cold War peak of sixteen member nations, the alliance's membership has continued to increase since the second phase of expansion began, and it currently stands at approximately thirty members.

The Western European states have experienced an immediate decline in their capabilities as a consequence of NATO's expansion because they correctly do not anticipate the emergence of any significant strategic or hegemonic threats in the east. Although Russia has captured portions of Ukraine, the misadventure has come at a debilitating cost; it is a shadow of its former self.

It is improbable that Russia will pose a continental threat in the near future. The Eastern European nations are under the protection of American manpower and logistics. NATO is perceived as the ultimate safeguard of their sovereignty and is seen to offer bureaucratic protection against the United States' becoming excessively nationalistic. This is why the majority of the Eastern European states, particularly the Baltics, are opposed to any form of European autonomy. NATO, like other bureaucratic organizations, has shifted its emphasis to out-of-area operations such as those in Afghanistan and Libya.

The American strategic community must be cognizant of how over time NATO and the character of the Atlantic alliance have changed. This chapter highlights some recent examples of NATO's shifting operational priorities and the ideological capture of its bureaucracy. It then attempts to explain these developments through the lens of a particular theoretical framework. Finally, it proposes a short road map for immediate reforms, aiming at a longer future restructuring.

Examples of NATO's Shift in Operational Priority

In 2019, the European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions, the Permanent Representation of Belgium to NATO, and the Joint Delegation of Canada to NATO cohosted a panel discussion on "Integrating LGBTQI Perspectives in Allied and Partner Armed Forces" in Brussels at

1. Peter Hitchens, "O Brother, Where Art Thou?", *Spectator*, October 13, 2001, https://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/13th-october-2001/19/o-brother-where-art-thou.

NATO's headquarters.[2]

It was "the first ever event on LGBTQI Perspectives at NATO" and was aimed at providing a forum where nations and institutions within the alliance—working on integrating diversity and inclusion perspectives in defense—could share tactics about the "best practices in promoting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) rights, equality and inclusion."

The official description of the event argued in favor of a host of such ideas, with no corroborating evidence for its recommendations, including that LGBTQI integration in the armed forces is a matter of promotion and that all who are willing to serve their country "deserve" to be recognized and respected for who they are (regardless of talent or efficiency). It also asserted that "as an international organisation based on common values (values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law), NATO should lead by example, by promoting LGBTQI rights and by acting towards inclusive armed forces. International organisations should also collaborate on this issue."

This event was only the tip of the iceberg regarding the military alliance's involvement in social politics. NATO marked an International Day Against Homophobia in 2017 with a tweet by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg: "LGBT people everywhere deserve dignity, inclusion and freedom from fear. Diversity makes our open societies stronger and safer."[3] It also hosted its first internal conference on LGBTQI perspectives in the workplace in 2021.[4]

This initiative was funded, organized, and staff-led through the "Proud @ NATO" group, with speakers such as Stoltenberg arguing that "diversity and inclusion is at the heart of who we are and what we do . . . drawing on all resources and all experiences makes us stronger, and better equipped to face the future." He added that the concept of "allyship" in the workplace includes "people who do not identify as LGBTQ+ themselves, yet want to see a more inclusive world."

Documenting how NATO is a world leader in diversity, the event demonstrated that NATO was also a leader in recognizing same-sex marriage: The organization provided equal spousal benefits to same-sex couples by July 2002, at a time when only the Netherlands recognized same-sex marriages.

Between 2002 and 2024, NATO changed, in its own words, from an organization that was only tolerant of diversity to one that

2. European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions, "First Ever LGBTQI Event at NATO," news release, June 2019, https://euromil.org/first-ever-lgbtqi-event-at-nato/.
3. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "NATO Secretary General Marks International Day Against Homophobia," news release, May 17, 2017, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_143802.htm.
4. NATO, "NATO Headquarters Hosts First-Ever Conference on LGBTQ+ Perspectives in the Workplace," news release, March 19, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_182424.htm.

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actively promotes diversity and inclusion policies across all its activities.[5] NATO's priorities reflected that shift from warfighting to auxiliary interests such as the Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence initiative.

NATO said in a policy brief that the institution would engage "with relevant International Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, partners, civil society, including women's rights organisations and women-led civil society, at-risk populations and other appropriate actors, including coordination with host nations as appropriate" during a conflict or "throughout the mission cycle to identify and analyse threats to civilians using the appropriate civil-military coordination mechanisms."[6] It also said that the organization needs to provide mandatory "pre-deployment" training to host nations' militaries and to "all personnel in NATO missions, operations and Council-mandated activities."

Similarly, NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept noted the need to integrate the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda across NATO's core tasks (deterrence and defense, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security), and added that "NATO will continue to advance gender equality as a reflection of its values."[7]

The secretary general's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, a position that was created in 2012 and made permanent in 2014, was key to this agenda. Accordingly, Gender Advisors are currently in place across NATO's military structures and in all operations and missions. Originally deployed in 2009 to NATO's Strategic Commands and the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, Gender Advisors are now at work across NATO structures and missions, including NATO Mission Iraq and NATO's Kosovo Force.

NATO also has a committee on gender, which it describes as follows: "The NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives promotes the integration of gender as a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of both women and men an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and military operations."[8]

The NATO International Military Staff (IMS) Office of the Gender Advisor is now a permanent fixture within NATO's command structure. It aims to provide "strategic advice" on the implementation of the WPS agenda at NATO and support the integration of the gender perspective into NATO's missions, operations, and activities. These include, in NATO's own words,

5. NATO, "Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility at NATO," news release, April 19, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_64099.htm.
6. NATO, "NATO Policy on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence," news release, May 31, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_184570.htm.
7. NATO, "NATO Policy on Women, Peace and Security (2024)," news release, July 10, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_227578.htm.
8. NATO, "Women, Peace and Security," October 31, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_91091.htm.

strategies of "gender mainstreaming" that work to achieve total gender equality by assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action "in all areas and at all levels."[9]

NATO's 2024 Policy on Women, Peace and Security argued that "climate change is a defining challenge of our time" and said that NATO recognizes the compounding impacts of gender inequality, conflict, and climate change on women and girls, with implications for security. It added that in order to emphasize that women have a valuable role to play in decision-making, NATO needs to comprehensively address climate change–related security challenges. It noted that these "impacts underscore the need to integrate gender perspectives in taking forward NATO's Agenda on Climate Change and Security and in its focus on awareness, adaptation, mitigation, and outreach."[10] The latest Women, Peace and Security and Human Security Bulletin was all about "Ukraine's women warriors."[11]

In 2024, the IMS Office of the Gender Advisor hosted a monthly Deep Dive session on Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) and the Gender Perspective, suggesting that NATO plays a "critical" role in incorporating gender perspectives into MDO.[12] The "Legal Analyst Capability and Cooperation Department at the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations" defined gender analysis as the systemic examination of information related to gender differences and social relations between men and women that allows NATO to identify and understand gender inequalities.

DEI at NATO

The use of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in both terminology and planning is enmeshed in NATO's administration. NATO said that "NATO derives its strength from its talented and diverse workforce. The Alliance's proactive strategies aim to attract, develop and retain a mix of people with different skills, backgrounds, experiences and cultures. Access to the broadest possible range of talent is essential to generate innovative ideas and insights, and represent the diversity of NATO countries."[13]

While that is a noble aim, the reality is different. The practice of DEI in NATO operates functionally as a way to maintain its ideological edifice. Consider some key examples. NATO headquarters hosted an event titled "We Are All Allies in the Face of Racial Discrimination," in which Admiral Rob Bauer, chair of NATO's Military Committee, said, "The call for racial justice and equity around the world has grown louder and louder over the years. And now

9. NATO, "IMS Office of the Gender Advisor," November 12, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_101372.htm.
10. NATO, "NATO Policy on Women, Peace and Security (2024)."
11. NATO Human Security Unit, "Special Edition: Women Defenders of Ukraine," *NATO WPS and HS Bulletin* 6 (June 2024): 1–32, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/2406-WPS-HS-Bulletin-6-en.pdf.
12. NATO, "NATO Deep Dive Recap: Multi-Domain Operations and the Gender Perspective," news release, July 24, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_229326.htm?selectedLocale=en.
13. NATO, "Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility at NATO."

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that NATO has entered into a new era of collective defence, the urgency of that call has grown even more. We are defending not only the physical safety of our people, but also the democratic values we all hold dear. That means that not only should we practice what we preach . . . but we also have a responsibility to ensure that we create a safe, free, inclusive environment. Collective defence is truly a task for the collective, we cannot afford to waste talent . . . because we are not inclusive enough."[14]

Panelists included the Assistant Secretary General for Policy and Planning Division Angus Lapsley, who underlined policies to achieve greater diversity in every institution within NATO. Solange Ndagijimana-Munezero, from the NATO Headquarters Consultation, Command and Control Staff; Patricia Nguyen, from the IMS Gender Advisor's Office; and Nydia Gormley-Russel, the chair of NATO Elevate Diversity, a Staff Resource Group, suggested examining NATO career issues "through the unique lens of employees of colour."

NATO's diversity measures also include the Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Action Plan to take proactive and measurable steps towards equality. The NATO Gender Balance and Diversity Task Force was established at the 2002 Prague summit with the aim of actively pursuing a diversity policy at NATO headquarters and with the long-term goal of increasing the number of women employed in the international staff positions, the number of women applying to work for the organization, and the number of women in managerial positions. NATO's first Staff Resource Group, "PROUD@NATO," was established in 2020 to promote LGBTQ+ perspectives at NATO.

Around two hundred participants from forty-four allied and partner nations attended the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives Annual Conference, themed "Gender Analysis in Action," where advisors on Gender Issues explained concrete action plans, aims, and strategies to promote gender-balanced recruitment.[15]

In 2023, NATO's IMS Office of the Gender Advisor discussed challenges to women and girls in the Sahel and explored how different local and international actors are promoting the Women, Peace and Security agenda there. Researchers discussed "expectations of excellence, the double burden of being a good wife and mother before pursuing a career, and the need for a man's support to succeed."[16]

January 2024 saw NATO headquarters welcome the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives Executive Committee to dis-

14. NATO, "NATO Officials and Staff Discuss Racial Diversity at NATO HQ," news release, May 8, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_214411.htm.
15. NATO, "The 47th NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives Annual Conference Focuses on 'Gender Analysis in Action' and Celebrates the 25th Anniversary of the IMS Office of the Gender Advisor," news release, October 6, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_218951.htm?selectedLocale=en.
16. NATO, "Deep Dive Recap: The Sahel and the Gender Perspective," news release, November 13, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_220947.htm?selectedLocale=en.

cuss NATO's priorities for the integration of the gender perspective. It was accepted that each NATO ally would designate "one active duty officer of senior rank (or civilian equivalent) as a delegate" to learn about the "latest national developments in gender approaches and tools for gender mainstreaming."[17]

A recent, exemplary illustration of the interplay of domestic U.S. military structure and DEI in NATO was an interview with the French army's Lieutenant Colonel Lauranne, who was the gender advisor for Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk, Virginia. Her job was to help the U.S. military to "integrate gender perspective into all of the NATO command's work strands and projects."[18] She said that she suffered discrimination due to bad eyesight, which harmed her combat opportunities. But she was selected by the French ministry in charge of gender equality, diversity, and equal opportunities to receive the "equality medal" and trained at the NATO Gender Advisor Course organized by the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations in Sweden. She said that work on "gender mainstreaming" helps "ensure our commitment to human rights and gender equality" and that "long-term gender equality contributes to stability and peace."

Theoretical Explanation of NATO's Shift in Priority

Not all of these incidents and programs are evidence of a malevolent ideological operation or a result of some grand conspiracy. But they are the consequences of a massive, intellectually corrupting, and debilitating bureaucratic bloat that has led to the growth of nonsensical projects manned by career bureaucrats whose interests encompass everything other than great power war and deterrence.

Some argue that these bureaucrats are not very influential and in no way affect U.S. foreign policy. But there is another side to that story. Some of the recent policy trends in NATO are also a result of American foreign policy and foreign funding itself, as evident above. And the influence of NATO's woke policies bleeds both ways. The factors that reinforce progressive ideological dogma on both sides of the Atlantic feed into each other, forming a transnational progressive ecosystem.

Consider the European politicization of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision, overturning *Roe v. Wade* in the United States. After the decision, almost all NATO leaders immediately took a side in the American domestic debate.[19] British Prime Minister Boris Johnson commented that it was a big step backward. French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted, "I wish to express my solidarity with the women whose liberties are being undermined by the Supreme Court of the United States."

17. NATO, "NATO Headquarters Welcomes the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives Executive Committee," news release, January 28–31, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_222538.htm?selectedLocale=en.
18. NATO, "Meet Lieutenant Colonel Lauranne, an Advisor Integrating Gender Perspectives into NATO Command's Work," news release, March 8, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_223353.htm?selectedLocale=en.
19. Ashley Parker and Matt Viser, "Biden Says America Is Leading: On Abortion, Europeans Disagree," *Washington Post*, June 26, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/06/26/biden-abortion-europeans/.

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An era of "distrust in women and distrust in doctors is coming to an end," German Justice Minister Marco Buschmann said, as the German parliament struck down a decade-old law that was meant to deter the advertisement of abortion services. Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that "the news coming out of the United States is horrific," a sentiment echoed by Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, who said that "my heart goes out to the millions of American women who are now set to lose their legal right to an abortion. I can't imagine the fear and anger you are feeling right now. A huge setback. The right to free abortion is one of the most fundamental rights that exists." Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said that he was "very concerned about implications of the U.S. Supreme Court decision . . . and the signal it sends to the world." Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's first minister, said it was "one of the darkest days for women's rights in my lifetime."[20] President Joe Biden, seizing on the allied support while speaking at the end of the NATO summit in Spain, called the Supreme Court's decision "destabilizing" and proposed a change to the Senate's filibuster rules to codify the right to an abortion and the right to privacy.[21]

Politico reported that at least four diplomats during the NATO summit aired concerns about the decision, and some released statements supporting abortion rights after the court decision.[22] Christina Lu argued in *Foreign Policy* that *Roe*'s reversal exposed the "Ever-Growing Value Gap" between the U.S. and NATO and added to the "broader trend of domestic dysfunction" that undermined Biden's democracy agenda at the NATO summit.[23]

None of this opinionating falls within the realm of customary diplomacy, much less the original remit of the NATO treaty. It was until recently the norm for elected allied leaders to not openly comment on the internal politics of their hegemonic protector. Nor was it normal for an elected president to take the side of other allied member states against his domestic opponents.

Why, therefore, is the study of NATO's changing character important? Quite simply because both NATO's bureaucracy and allied powers in NATO often under-

20. Stephen Wright and Lawrence Norman, "World Leaders React on Roe v. Wade," *Wall Street Journal*, last updated June 25, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/supreme-court-decision-roe-v-wade-6-24-2022/card/europeans-react-on-roe-v-wade-YQY9SV-jtWc4K7DIfB0R8.
21. Justin Tasolides, "At NATO Summit, Biden Calls for Roe to Be Codified, Backs Filibuster Exception for Abortion Rights," *Spectrum News*, June 30, 2022, https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2022/06/30/biden-abortion-filibuster-roe-v-wade-supreme-court-nato.
22. Andrew Desiderio, "The Elephant in the NATO Room: America's Roe Reversal," *Politico*, June 30, 2022, https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/30/nato-roe-wade-response-00043305; David M. Herszenhorn, "European Leaders Decry U.S. Restriction of Abortion Rights," *Politico*, June 5, 2022, https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-leaders-decry-us-restriction-abortion-rights-supreme-court/.
23. Christina Lu, "Roe Reversal Exposes the 'Ever-Growing Value Gap' Between U.S. and Allies," *Foreign Policy*, July 6, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/06/us-abortion-dobbs-roe-biden-democracy-credibility-agenda/.

mine democratic debate within the United States, even though NATO's major funder is the American people. Woke NATO policies also have real costs to the security of a United States now constrained by resurgent near-peer rivals such as China and a revanchist Russia.

As Jennifer Lind noted in a recent, influential paper, the current global distribution of power signals a return to bipolarity after almost a quarter century of unipolarity and hegemony.[24] "Bipolarity will also likely transform U.S. grand strategy and alliances," she wrote. "The onset of unipolarity in the 1990s led the United States to expand its foreign policy ambitions, while many U.S. allies reduced their military capabilities. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in particular, grew increasingly lopsided in terms of leadership and resources." And the changing structure of the global distribution of power means that NATO is now unable to continue its core task due to auxiliary interests, as described above.

NATO's new direction can be understood through analyzing NATO's current philosophical bent in light of John Fonte's study of the core philosophical impulse of today's NATO, namely "Transnational Progressivism" (TP).[25] Fonte describes TP, an instinct turbocharged during the post–Cold War unipolarity, as having the following tenets: a "redefinition of democracy and 'democratic ideals,'" a deconstruction of national narratives and national symbols, and a promotion of the concept of postnational citizenship, with the idea of transnationalism as a major conceptual tool.[26]

The reasons for this shift are threefold: the sweeping subsurface power grab by liberal internationalists in every Western institution, the growth of DEI bureaucracy and the rise of the surplus elites, and the logic of unipolarity, which allowed a massive expansion and bloat of American power.

Seen through that lens, NATO's changed character is also a reflection of a woke State Department, which has created an echo chamber of assorted research and think tank reports both from within the United States and without. As James Kirchick wrote in Brookings, "In my study tour group's meetings with Baltic officials, the question repeatedly came up of why the United States should risk blood and treasure in the defense of tiny countries along Russia's border." He added that "one suspects that if Russia were a place where Pride parades were allowed, its quarrels with the United States, and ours with it, would diminish."[27]
Canada's NATO Association called NATO to "act" against member states when they curb LGBT rights: "The aim of NATO enlargement is to promote 'stability and

24. Jennifer Lind, "Back to Bipolarity: How China's Rise Transformed the Balance of Power," *International Security* 49, no. 2 (2024): 7–55, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00494.
25. Paul Seaton, "Transnational Progressivism and U.S.," *Law & Liberty*, August 14, 2017, https://lawliberty.org/transnational-progressivism-and-u-s/.
26. John Fonte, *Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or Be Ruled by Others?* (Encounter Books, 2011).
27. James Kirchick, "What Does a Pride Parade Have to Do with NATO? More Than You Might Think," *Washington Post*, June 25, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/06/25/post-soviet-lands-respect-gay-rights-is-good-barometer-democracys-health/.

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cooperation,'" with the goal of "building a Europe united in peace, democracy and common values. NATO must therefore respond to the security crisis that the LGBTQ+ community faces at home."[28]

In recent years, the Biden administration has used NATO as an arm to promote liberal internationalism and global governance and to transform the American military from within.[29] Christopher F. Rufo reported that "the White House required each federal agency to submit detailed DEI progress reports regularly, appoint a chief diversity officer, and create 'Agency Equity Teams,' whose leaders were tasked with 'delivering equitable outcomes.'" These requirements contributed to what the president called "an ambitious whole-of-government equity agenda."[30]

That agenda was spread by the State Department through the president's "Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World." Starting in 2021, Rufo wrote, the State Department and other foreign agencies were directed to observe and "report on the 'LGBTQI+' policies of our allies, to 'broaden the number of countries willing to support and defend' the radical Left's understanding of gender—for example, by funding pro-transgender 'civil society advocates' in order to shift public opinion in those countries—and to tie in the principles of gender theory to America's foreign-aid programs." The American government was fully complicit in transforming NATO and gave European allies tacit permission to promote and lecture domestic opponents and conservatives on liberal internationalism and woke politics.

A Road Map to Reform

No long-term NATO reform will be possible without the United States' reforming its own State Department and thus its foreign policy. The United States is the largest contributor to NATO measured by GNP. Those contributions include direct and indirect funding of NATO as well as various State Department endeavors that primarily promote a woke foreign policy. NATO reform should start here at home.

CRA's model budget already highlights ways to cut woke bloat in the State Department apparatus, including defunding any future Equity Action Plan and USAID, whose funds are used for projects with goals such as addressing "restrictive gender norms and inequalities."[31] As the model budget notes, the State Department's family planning programs often also push abortion access and LGBT "awareness" across the world.

The State Department also funded the

28. Jordan McEwen and Diana Fodor, "NATO Needs to Act When Member States Curb LGBTQ+ Rights," NATO Association of Canada, August 4, 2022, https://natoassociation.ca/nato-needs-to-act-when-member-states-curb-lgbtq-rights%E2%80%AF%E2%80%AF%E2%80%AF/.
29. J. A. Cauthen, "The Corrupting Influence of DEI on Military Education," James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal, August 21, 2024, https://www.jamesgmartin.center/2024/08/the-corrupting-influence-of-dei-on-military-education/.
30. Christopher F. Rufo, "How Gender Ideology Captured the State Department," *City Journal*, October 30, 2024, https://www.city-journal.org/article/how-gender-ideology-captured-the-state-department.
31. "Budget," Center for Renewing America, accessed July 14, 2025, https://americarenewing.com/issue/budget/.

British "Global Disinformation Index" to blacklist and block American conservative media companies. Tackling that index would be a key signal to the rest of the world that the United States is determined to move forward with a value-neutral and non-ideological foreign policy, based solely on geographical and strategic interests—a change from the last quarter century of grand strategy laced with misplaced and often revolutionary liberal internationalism and neoconservatism.

But NATO's funding and structure will also need to change for NATO to recover its original intent and purpose. In order to do that, a few quick solutions should be implemented. NATO is bound to collect all defense expenditure information from NATO allies on a regular basis to present aggregate funding data. Each ally's ministry of defense submits a report of that member state's current and future estimated defense expenditures. NATO could initiate a total cost breakdown of each ministry of defense's audit to see how much of its defense expenses goes towards DEI and related social projects and deduct that portion from its aggregate spending expense. For example, if a NATO ally is spending a chunk of its defense budget on DEI-related projects, it would be required to show that spending as a separate breakdown in its data filed to NATO, and it should know that any such expense will not be considered a core defense expenditure and accordingly will not be counted towards the expected 2 percent or more of GDP spent on defense.

NATO should work towards declassifying its International Board of Auditors for NATO reports and the financial statements of NATO Reporting Entities and make them available to member states. These reports must include civil and military budgets as well as details of financial audit reports and highlight every nonmilitary expenditure that NATO undertook in the previous year.

NATO's Strategic Concept needs to be overhauled to highlight NATO's essential core tasks. Currently those include not only deterrence and defense but also crisis prevention and management and cooperative security.[32] Those priorities need to be streamlined to deterrence and defense to align with the purpose of the original alliance. Currently NATO's efforts lead to "safeguarding" shared values, which often are subjective and are interpreted in various non-defense-related agendas such as climate change and human security and the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which is embedded in NATO's operations. All of these latter agendas should be rolled back. Any allied country whose policies or institutions allow for a "blacklist" of Americans and affect their free speech rights should not be considered to be aligned with American values.

32. NATO, "Transparency and Accountability," December 20, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111582.htm#tbl; "NATO Unclassified," Civil Budget Recommendation Summary, 2023, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/12/pdf/221214-CB_2023-ExecSum.pdf.

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In 1949, an authoritarian Portugal was a founding member of NATO, and as a member state it remained authoritarian until 1974 without harming NATO's core mission. The junta-led Greece and Turkey, both of which experienced several coups, were members of NATO. The current government of Turkey is no epitome of liberal democracy. But none of that affected NATO's defensive performance or affected its ideological framing. The recent bloat of an ideological bureaucracy within NATO is a historical aberration, an effect of material and structural factors such as unipolarity, and can be accordingly reversed without jeopardizing the defense of the alliance.

NATO is a defensive alliance, based on finite geography and structural and material interests. It serves its members well when it sticks to its defensive character and caters to its central area of interest, the North Atlantic. NATO's character shift to an ideological vehicle of liberal internationalism at best creates backlash among European populaces against American ideological overreach and entices smaller states to attempt to shape U.S. grand strategy by appealing to a vague and malleable "transnational progressivism."

At worst, it creates conditions where smaller protectorate states can interfere in American domestic politics and encourages NATO's focus to shift to humanitarian and ideological interventions. At a time of great power rivalry and emerging multipolarity, it is imperative to cut out the ideological fat that has been so unhealthy for America and her allies.

NATO's Escalation Caucus

This booklet so far has explained the social policies that resulted from NATO's massive bureaucratic bloat and expansion eastward, backed by the U.S. and Eastern European states. But the debate about NATO's enlargement and the implications for U.S. foreign policy is moot without a cursory understanding of NATO's "escalation caucus," a term first memorably used by Justin Logan.[1]

The Baltic states' perceptions and anxieties regarding Russia are legitimate, but they differ from those of Western Europe and the United States. The group's core interest is diluted by its relentless ideological liberalism and constant efforts to expand the Atlantic alliance. The Baltic states are at risk of losing the long-term support of the opposing party in power if they adopt policies that are in opposition to the preferences of a significant number of Americans and take sides in America's domestic politics.

In order to ensure the primary security of the theater, it would be more beneficial for both parties to restrict the expansion of any further alliances and to encourage the establishment of localized logistics and force structures, as well as mini ententes. The United States would serve as the final protector. This arrangement would reduce the security burden on the United States and minimize the perception of European free-riding among the American public.

A substantial portion of the American right is justifiably skeptical of European free-riding and transnational liberalism, particularly in light of a quarter century of primacist foreign policy that frequently employed force to advance its values abroad. In this context, the Baltic states' persistent requests for the United States to support the expansion of an alliance structure that is intended to ensure their safety may dilute their core geostrategic interests by extending the United States beyond its appropriate boundaries.

European states, particularly the Baltic protectorates of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, are also at risk of alienating one side of American domestic debates by aligning themselves with the other. An alternative grand strategy would be to facilitate shared interests, taking into account the structural realities of geography, differing national interests, changed global threats in an emerging multipolarity, and the resistance among American conservatives to foreign

1. Justin Logan (@JustinTLogan), "NATO's escalation caucus is hard at work. Again. Still. https://breakingdefense.com/2024/05/estonia-seriously-discussing-sending-troops-to-rear-jobs-in-ukraine-official/," X, May 13, 2024, https://x.com/JustinTLogan/status/1790066467641168302.

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free-riding and interference in American domestic debates.

The first section of this chapter delineates the threat perceptions of the three Baltic states. The second investigates the changing sentiments of the American electorate and their consequences. The last proposes that a territorially finite alliance, local ententes, and burden-sharing are necessary as compromises that are acceptable to all parties and serve as an alternative grand strategy.

The Baltic states' national security documents and threat analyses are unanimous in their commitment to maintaining a close relationship with the United States, to the extent that it is listed as their top priority, regardless of the expense.[2] Despite all the rhetoric regarding a "rules-based liberal order," "institutions," and "European values," the Baltic states are American protectorates, and the United States serves as the hegemonic security provider. Estonia's security document, for example, reads, "Actions that are designed to undermine NATO and the solidarity of allies endanger Estonia and transatlantic security."

"The central factor in the security of Estonia and the whole of Europe" is "U.S. involvement in maintaining European security," according to Estonia's National Security Concept of 2017, which summarizes the region's threat perception. According to the Latvian National Security Strategy, "The United States of America is and will remain the key strategic partner of Latvia in the field of defense and military matters." Similarly, Lithuania's "active membership of the USA in NATO and its military presence in the Republic of Lithuania and the Baltic region" is "the key guarantee of security of the Republic of Lithuania."

Baltic politicians' rhetoric, in addition to their official documents, advocates for more American involvement in Europe. Kaja Kallas, the outspoken Estonian prime minister, expressed concern in a 2022 interview with *The Washington Post* that calls for peace negotiations were being heard: "I worry that we hear calls for peace negotiations, which very generally means Ukraine should give away some of its territory."[3] She added, "The bigger question is why Ukraine has to give up territory." Kallas has been at the vanguard of channeling and shaping a robust cross-continental response to Russian aggression in Ukraine and has often criticized the West's lack of resolve. She warned *Politico* that war fatigue was imminent in all regions, contending that "we cannot be tired because we are obligated to assist Ukraine in defending

2. See Estonian Ministry of Defense, "Estonia National Security Concept," 2017, https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/national_security_concept_2017_0.pdf; Estonian Ministry of Defense, "Estonia National Defence Strategy," 2011, https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/national_defence_strategy.pdf; Legislation of the Republic of Latvia, "National Security Concept," September 26, 2019, https://likumi.lv/ta/id/309647-par-nacionalas-drosibas-koncepcijas-apstiprinasanu; Second Investigation Department under the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, *The Military Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania*, *National Threat Assessment* 2020, https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2020-Gresmes-En.pdf; Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, *National Security Strategy* 2017, January 17, 2017, https://www.newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2017-nacsaugstrategijaen.pdf; *Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania*, The Military Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania, March 17, 2016, https://kam.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/karine-strategija-EN-2016.pdf.
3. Liz Sly, "Estonian Leader Urges Faster Help for Ukraine amid Signs of War Fatigue," *Washington Post*, June 16, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/06/16/estonia-kallas-ukraine-allies-aid/.

their country."[4]

Kallas also delineated what she perceives as a certain naïveté toward Russia in the West, particularly among Western conservative circles, as well as in France and Germany. She maintained that the Russian military, despite its failure to capture Kiev and its operational stalemate in the eastern region of Ukraine, is still a threat. She argued that NATO has been a successful defense alliance because no NATO nation has ever been attacked. But she also asserted that NATO's "tripwire" strategy is outdated and that the Baltic states would be eliminated from the map under the current plans for the defense of the Baltics, which involve a small, forward-positioned garrison of Western (primarily American) tripwire forces.[5]

Kallas's comments are a prime example of the Baltic response to Russian aggression, but they are by no means the only ones. Dalia Grybauskait, the former president of Lithuania, said in an interview with CNBC that Putin is only capable of comprehending "the language of strength" and that sanctions are insufficient to impede him.[6] Linas Linkeviius, the former minister of foreign affairs of Lithuania, said in an interview that Ukraine should receive economic and financial assistance.[7] Kersti Kaljulaid, the former president of Estonia, said in an interview that Kiev is "not fighting only for Ukraine, but for all of us." She argued that the focus should be expanded beyond Ukraine because, she believes, the war poses a potential threat to all of Europe. She has also advocated for the continued rapid expansion of NATO to encompass Moldova, Georgia, and other countries. "And we should do so expeditiously," she said.[8]

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all have demanded armed naval escorts to and from Ukrainian ports and a no-fly zone over Ukraine. They have proposed escalation as an alternative to pursuing a negotiated resolution and have deemed calls for a ceasefire "premature."[9] Former politicians

4. Andrew Desiderio and Paul McLeary, "Ukraine Gets Top Billing at NATO, but Questions Mount over West's Resolve," *Politico*, June 30, 2022, https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/30/ukraine-nato-west-00043649.
5. See Dasha Litvinova and Harriet Morris, "The AP Interview: Estonian PM Says Russia Not Weary of War," Associated Press, June 23, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/kaja-kallas-estonia-prime-minister-interview-5ad4bcc1fd76d9c5530129160fafa814; Ott Tammik, "Estonia's Kallas Warns of Existential Russian Threat to Baltics," *Bloomberg*, June 22, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-22/estonia-s-kallas-warns-of-existential-russian-threat-to-baltics; Sten Hankewitz, "Kaja Kallas: Estonia Would Be Wiped off the Map Under Current NATO Plans," *Estonian World*, June 23, 2022, https://estonianworld.com/security/kaja-kallas-estonia-would-be-wiped-off-the-map-under-current-nato-plans%EF%BF%BC/; Michel Martin, "Estonia's Prime Minister Kaja Kallas on How the NATO Summit Went," *NPR*, June 30, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/06/30/1109051151/estonias-prime-minister-kaja-kallas-on-how-the-nato-summit-went; Richard Milne, "Kaja Kallas: 'There Is a Certain Naivety Towards Russia,'" *Financial Times*, February 18, 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/098ba985-1284-46c6-9abe-f626fa9e47f0.
6. Ravi Buddhavarapu, "Putin Needs to Be Stopped in the Battlefield—Not with Sanctions, Says Ex-President of Lithuania," CNBC, June 29, 2022, https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/29/putin-needs-to-be-stopped-in-the-battlefield-not-with-sanctions-says-ex-president-of-lithuania.html.
7. Linas Linkeviius Vazha Tavberidze, "We Should Not Have Let Putin Become What He Is Today: An Interview with Linas Linkevicius," *New European*, February 26, 2022, https://neweasterneurope.eu/2022/02/26/we-should-not-have-let-putin-become-what-he-is-today/.
8. GZERO Staff, "Ukraine Is Fighting for All of Us, Says Estonia's Former President Kersti Kaljulaid," *GZERO Media*, February 19, 2022, https://www.gzeromedia.com/global-stage/posts/ukraine-is-fighting-for-all-of-us-says-estonias-former-president-kersti-kaljulaid.
9. See Giulia Carbonaro, "Estonia Becomes First NATO Member to Call for No-Fly Zone Over Ukraine," *Newsweek*, March 15, 2022, https://www.newsweek.com/estonia-parliament-first-nato-member-call-no-fly-zone-over-ukraine-1688069; BNS/TBT Staff, "Lithuanian Parliament Calls for No-Fly Zone over Ukraine," *Baltic Times*, March 17, 2022, https://www.baltictimes.com/lithuanian_parliament_calls_for_no-fly_zone_over_ukraine/; Natalia Drozdiak and Rosalind Mathieson, "Support Grows for Naval Escorts for Ukraine Grain, Estonia Says," *Bloomberg*, May 24, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-24/support-grows-for-naval-escorts-for-ukraine-grain-estonia-says.

in these countries have advocated for collective punishment and the complete diplomatic isolation of Russia despite the potential for China and Russia to form a military alliance.[10]

The Baltic states have been particularly vocal in opposing the ascendant conservative nationalism in the United States and among certain sections of the Western alliance, and they are increasingly in favor of expanding NATO. These positions are perplexing. The Baltic states should exercise additional caution in their rhetoric due to their precarious geographic location, as their security is fundamentally guaranteed by the generosity of great powers, particularly the United States' presence in the European balance.

The U.S. security umbrella, rather than the rule of law, institutions, or other powers, is the sole guarantee of territorial security in the most eastern regions of Europe. Yet, their recent rhetoric indicates that the Baltic states are increasingly inclined to adopt strategies that could potentially discourage and dissuade one half of the American electorate from supporting their continued protection.[11]

It is becoming more challenging to persuade half of the American electorate that it is worthwhile to spend American blood and treasure to guarantee the continuation of a liberal social revolution in the most remote regions of Europe.[12] Although there is still a bipartisan structure in the United States that prioritizes NATO expansion and values transatlanticism, there have been two significant developments.

10. See Benjamin Bathke, "Estonia's Prime Minister: 'We Need to Help Ukraine Win,'" *Foreign Policy*, June 3, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/03/estonia-russia-ukraine-war-kallas-baltics-nato/; Lili Bayer, "NATO Needs 'Visible' Counter to Russia Threat via Belarus, Lithuania Warns," *Politico*, June 24, 2022, https://www.politico.eu/article/gitanas-nauseda-lithuania-nato-russia-belarus-ukraine-invasion-counter/; Richard Milne, "Latvian and Lithuanian Leaders Urge Western Unity to Defeat Russia in Ukraine," *Financial Times*, June 8, 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/17162207-a4b7-4430-b39c-33222c3ccdea; Ben Hall, "Calls for Ceasefire in Ukraine Are 'Premature', Estonia's PM Warns," *Financial Times*, June 6, 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/8296294b-6684-4e32-a467-ba4e4ba1lb36; Steven Erlanger, "Estonia's Tough Voice on Ukraine Urges No Compromise with Putin," *New York Times*, May 16, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/world/europe/estonia-kallas-ukraine-russia.html; Jenna McLaughlin, "Former Estonian President Speaks About the War in Ukraine and the Way Forward," *NPR*, June 2, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/06/02/1102234774/former-estonian-president-speaks-about-the-war-in-ukraine-and-the-way-forward.
11. See Doug Bandow, "Does Lithuania Want to Start a War with Russia?," CATO Institute, June 30, 2022, https://www.cato.org/commentary/does-lithuania-want-start-war-russia, and Christopher Mott, "Woke Imperium: The Coming Confluence Between Social Justice and Neoconservatism," white paper, The Institute for Peace & Diplomacy, June 27, 2022, https://peacediplomacy.org/2022/06/27/woke-imperium-the-coming-confluence-between-social-justice-and-neoconservatism/.
12. For a few recent news articles demonstrating the depth of "common values" between the conservatives in the United States and NATO allies, see Jen Kirby, "Why America's Allies Are Worried About the End of Roe," *Vox*, June 30, 2022, https://www.vox.com/23186751/roe-supreme-court-europe-world-reaction; Bradley Devlin, "Why Should America Fight for Wokeness In Europe?," *American Conservative*, July 27, 2022, https://www.theamericanconservative.com/why-should-america-fight-for-wokeness-in-europe/; Ian Miles Cheong, "Swedish Armed Forces Says Supporting LGBTQ Pride Is Part of Army's 'Core Values,'" *Rebel News*, August 3, 2022, https://www.rebelnews.com/swedish_armed_forces_says_supporting_lgbtq_pride_is_part_of_armys_core_values; Kate Fowler, "Finnish Parliament Sends Powerful Roe v. Wade Message to 'American Sisters,'" *Newsweek*, July 6, 2022, https://www.newsweek.com/sofia-virta-roe-v-wade-abortion-rights-finnish-parliament-1722288; Andrew Desiderio, "The Elephant in the NATO Room: America's Roe Reversal," *Politico*, June 30, 2022, https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/30/nato-roe-wade-response-00043505; Marcus Ytter, "16-Åringar Föreslås Få Ändra Sitt Juridiska Kön," *SVT Nyheter*, July 29, 2022, https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/forslag-om-att-16-aringar-ska-fa-andra-sitt-juridiska-kon; Justin Logan, "Is Estonia Worth a War?," *National Interest*, April 10, 2014, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/estonia-worth-war-10226; and Rajan Menon and William Ruger, "NATO Enlargement and US Grand Strategy: A Net Assessment," *International Politics* 57 (June 2020): 371–400, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00235-7.

First, as U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates cautioned in 2011, future generations of Americans may regard European free-riding as a flaw rather than a benefit of the NATO alliance, and its expansion may not be appealing to them. Second, conservative realists and populists are already engaging in a much-needed reevaluation of established policies and norms.

The second point is of the utmost importance. The new conservative realist and nationalist leadership is a growing force that has raised justifiable grievances regarding the country's foreign policy after twenty years of failed internationalism. The old guard will be replaced sooner or later as the grassroots trend decisively against intervention. When the reins are handed to this new generation of leaders, they will remember which side the European liberal elite took in American domestic debates. Liberal internationalists are making enemies of conservative Americans by repeatedly and sanctimoniously expressing their opinions on and taking sides on domestic issues ranging from Supreme Court decisions on abortion to debates about the Second Amendment and gender ideology.

As many conservatives in the United States see it, there will eventually be no shared values to defend. When an alliance transitions from one of interests to one of shared values, the values must be predicated on the alliance's security requirements. If there is no interest in defending the remote regions of Europe, and there are fewer and fewer shared values, the expansion of the alliance would be a ruse because there would be no desire to enforce the alliance's terms. It is not surprising that many are already questioning NATO's future course.[13]

The Baltic states are doubling down on their risky grand strategy for a number of reasons. A minor state within a large alliance often believes that it does not risk genuine loss of influence within the alliance if the alliance expands. In reality, the hegemon is more constrained by the increased size of the alliance.

The expansion of an alliance would reinforce the liberal internationalist orthodoxy and proliferate an imperial, self-sustaining, and expanding bureaucracy, thereby complicating the ability of a hegemon such as the United States to act in accordance with its own interests rather than those of the group. The agreement for protectorate states is more advantageous when the alliance is larger and Russo-American relations are deteriorating.

The likelihood of increased Russo-American friction is directly proportional to

13. See Doug Bandow, "NATO No Longer Serves American Interests," CATO Institute, December 5, 2019, https://www.cato.org/commentary/nato-no-longer-serves-american-interests; Linley Sanders, "How Does America Feel About NATO? Support for Alliance Falls Across Key Western Nations," YouGov US, April 4, 2019, https://today.yougov.com/politics/articles/22775-how-does-america-feel-about-nato; Moira Fagan, "NATO Is Seen Favorably in Many Member Countries, but Almost Half of Americans Say It Does Too Little," Pew Research Center, July 9, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/07/09/nato-is-seen-favorably-in-many-member-countries-but-almost-half-of-americans-say-it-does-too-little/; Frank Newport, "Trump's Foreign Policy and American Public Opinion," Gallup, July 12, 2018, https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/237134/trump-foreign-policy-american-public-opinion.aspx; Daniel S. Hamilton, "American Support for NATO Is Strong—but There Is a Wrinkle," Wilson Center, September 18, 2020. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/american-support-nato-strong-there-wrinkle.

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the number of states in the alliance. The European nations have historical (and justifiable) reasons to fear and oppose Russia. This, in conjunction with the European Union's liberalizing influence and the shrinking space of neutral buffers between Western Europe and Russia, has led to a growing number of states' supporting the export of liberal internationalism. They see no distinction between Russia, Viktor Orbán, and Brexiteers, and they ignore American taxpayers' growing apprehension regarding ever-expanding alliances and commitments in Europe.

This perspective also explains their increasing inclination to align with one perspective in the domestic American discourse regarding the Supreme Court, migration, abortion, foreign policy, and Donald Trump. There are numerous historical examples of states that have become so convinced of their own governing ideologies that they have reached the point of strategic irrationality. Small states that are security-dependent on a "cohesive alliance" (the key word here being "cohesive") backed by a hegemon that is equally interested in defending the alliance should not pursue a grand strategy that further diffuses the alliance's core interests. The decision-making process of the alliance is inadvertently compromised by the addition of members, which in turn promotes further free-riding from existing members and undermines its efficiency.

The strategic interests of the collective also may be compromised by a more extensive alliance. And the strategic imperative for the United States to prevent Russia from controlling Donbas is distinct from the strategic necessity to prevent Russia from controlling Belgium and Germany and threats to the English Channel.

Lastly, there is a risk associated with a minor state unambiguously aligning itself with a single perspective in a domestic debate within the hegemon: This could incite animosity among the opposing faction, which is always one election away from assuming power. Historically, American grand strategy has been designed to promote the organic development of a balance of power and to ensure that no hegemon controls the entire European continent.

The United States continues to serve as an offshore balancer of last resort, while the wealthy European nations are responsible for funding their own security. But the Baltic states are determined to maintain the United States' connection to Europe by relying on the U.S. security umbrella and preventing Russia from engaging in further revanchism. These two strategic objectives are partially at variance. But there are immediate measures that could be implemented to restore a mutually beneficial balance of interests.

The United States will eventually be compelled to concentrate on Asia as a result of a systemic shock due to structural changes in the global order, such as a conflict initiated by China on Taiwan or a significant Chinese attempt to dominate the Indo-Pa-

cific region, which spans from Djibouti to Japan.[14] The majority of the American public is apprehensive about additional entanglements, and the United States is overextended.[15]

The United States is once again assuming all of Europe's burdens, a situation that poses a risk of insolvency, despite high inflation and enormous debt. It has also been diverted from its most critical strategic objectives, which include retrenchment, pivoting to Asia, and restoring responsibility for security to Western Europe. The cause of this misalignment is NATO's expansion.

The United States tried to establish peace on the continent by promoting the expansion of the European Union. But this effort led to the atrophy of the natural balancers within Europe: the western great powers of Britain, France, and Germany. Consequently, the European Union emerged as a free-riding trade superpower that rivals the United States. The western powers began to exploit the United States as their frontiers expanded eastward and were protected by American muscle as a result of NATO's eastward expansion. Policy officials should reinstate the historic grand strategy, initially by fostering and enforcing the rapid rearmament of major powers within the continent and establishing mini ententes. British–Polish alignment, the organic development of Greco-French Mediterranean naval cooperation, and the enormous rearmament of Poland are all positive developments in this direction.[16]

Local powers within the Atlantic alliance should be responsible for local alignments, internal NATO logistics, NATO troop patrols, armor, funding, and brigade-level deployments, while the United States should serve as a "balancer of last resort" for NATO allies and provide the nuclear umbrella for an overarching European deterrence.

Europe, particularly the western powers of the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, France, and Italy, has the capacity to provide the necessary personnel and financial resources to establish a permanent and robust forward position in the Baltics. These countries have refrained from doing so thus far because they know that they can depend on the forward presence of the United States.

Rather than advocating for preposterous pan-European strategies, such as those

14. Elbridge Colby, "America Must Prepare for a War Over Taiwan," *Foreign Affairs*, August 10, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/america-must-prepare-war-over-taiwan.
15. Gabriele Ferretti, Giuseppe Irto, Federico Mellace, Taro Nishikawa, Jonas Schweigard, and Christoph Trebesch, "Ukraine Support Tracker," Kiel Institute for the World Economy, accessed July 14, 2025, https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/.
16. Xavier Vavasseur, "Eunomia: Cyprus Greece France and Italy Conducting Combined Drills in Eastern Med," *Naval News*, August 28, 2020, https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/08/eunomia-cyprus-greece-france-and-italy-conducting-combined-drills-in-eastern-med/; Staff Writer with AFP, "Greece and France to 'Reinforce' Bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement," *Defense Post*, February 24, 2020, https://thedefensepost.com/2020/02/24/greece-france-defense-agreement/; Alan Charlish and Anna Koper, "Poland to Buy Jets, Tanks and Howitzers from South Korea, Says Minister," Reuters, July 22, 2022, https://www.reuters.com/business/poland-buy-jets-tanks-howitzers-south-korea-says-minister-2022-07-22/; Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland, "Polish-British Military Cooperation Strengthens NATO's Eastern Flank," news release, March 17, 2022, https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/polish-british-military-cooperation-strengthens-natos-eastern-flank.

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outlined in the European Council Strategic Compass, or European Defence Funds, regionalized local power alignments should facilitate planning and implementation while the United States should facilitate the management and support of capability gaps. A superb model to emulate in this context is Britain's support for the Baltic states' defense.

Secondly, in the event that the conflict in Ukraine results in a negotiated settlement, U.S. leaders should be forthright with allies regarding the United States' intention to transfer the primary burden of defense to Europe, including its reinforcements in the eastern frontier. The southern perimeter of NATO should be fortified by the French and Turkish navies, and the northern flank should be fortified by Scandinavian and German land forces.

The argument for the enlargement of NATO was that it would provide the necessary manpower for patrolling and positioning in the Baltic states, but there is no reason why Europeans cannot provide that manpower with the help of Finnish and Swedish forces.[17] In order to transfer the primary responsibility for deterrence and defense on NATO's eastern front to the Europeans, the United States should propose clear, achievable objectives for repositioning forces on a fixed timeline. These objectives should mandate the withdrawal of American land troops on a specific date, regardless of European readiness.

The objectives also should address European troop numbers and logistical capabilities. Nuclear deterrence should be maintained exclusively by the U.S. Navy and strategic forces. Without a clear timeline to create a sense of urgency, Europe will likely continue to delay this shifting of the security burden indefinitely.

The Baltic states risk antagonizing a substantial portion of the U.S. population and the ascendant force of conservative nationalist leaders, who are already weary of bearing the disproportionate burden in Europe while being labeled as bigots and isolationists, if they begin to advocate for further expansion of NATO or for more American financial and military involvement and an aggressive posture in Ukraine.

European nations also should realize that European commentary on domestic matters in the United States is not well received. Their free-riding is already detrimental enough without added sanctimony and partiality from protectorates. Defensible and fixed frontiers and realist allies are essential for a robust security architecture in Europe that benefits the European states and the United States. Highly ideological and revanchist protectorates frustrate that aim.

In summary, a prudent course of action for the United States is supporting a Dormant NATO with fixed borders, fewer administrators and more soldiers, strong allies ca-

17. UK Ministry of Defence, "Joint Expeditionary Force Deploys to the Baltics," press release, May 20, 2022, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-expeditionary-force-deploys-to-the-baltics; Jonathan Askonas and Gil Barndollar, "With Finland and Sweden in NATO, the U.S. Can Finally Pivot to the Pacific," *Foreign Policy,* July 12, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/12/finland-sweden-nato-us-europe-pacific-military-pivot-strategy-geopolitics/.

pable of serving as the front-line defense, U.S. retrenchment and offshore balancing, and a tacit recognition that European sanctimony has reached its limit. European opposition to further expansion or adventurism is necessary to achieve greater long-term security, negative peace, and equilibrium in the European neighborhood, with at least a semblance of continued bipartisan American support. Currently, the alliance's core geographic interests are diluted by NATO's shifting borders. The United States is unable to plan or provide security for a mutating entity in the absence of a defined boundary, and it cannot continue to be chained by self-righteous protectorates.

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A Dormant NATO Strategy

Previous CRA briefs have argued that the United States needs a new grand strategy for the emergence of a natural equilibrium in Europe that will encourage the rise of European natural balancers and ensure a finite NATO bloc with no further expansion. This chapter argues for a complementary strategy of a Dormant NATO framework consisting of two major pillars. The first pillar is significant retrenchment and burden-shifting in Europe, with a pledge towards a finite NATO border and no further territorial expansion. The second pillar is the facilitation of a framework for transitioning to European manpower as the primary defense of Europe's frontiers, with America acting as the balancer of last resort instead of providing a perpetual forward presence.

As noted earlier, the expansion of NATO was an ideological decision during the peak of the post–Cold War unipolarity and was never sustainable. Like most bureaucracies, the supranational organization grew in order to survive. It morphed from a military alliance into an ideological and political group that found new tasks to sustain its existence while undermining the nationalist or independent strategic thinking of its member states. The expansion of NATO has stymied European burden-sharing in two main ways. It resulted in perpetual free-riding for the western powers, who saw no threat on their horizon. It also led to the creation of a number of eastern protectorates that are unsustainably dependent on foreign great powers for survival. Yet these protectorates are often ideologically liberal internationalists who are extremely sanctimonious and partial to taking sides in the domestic debates of their foreign great power benefactors.

In this context, it is essential to remember that enforced burden-shifting in Europe is more manageable than compelled burden-sharing. Burden-sharing is a collaborative process that risks derailment by the entrenched regional protectorates in Europe and the NATO bureaucracy. Burden-shifting would be a unilateral exercise of power driven by American interests. It would provide a short, firm timeline that would force Europe to make a plan based on its resources and alternatives. Europe today faces no comparable threat to the one it faced during the Cold War, and its combined capabilities far outweigh those of Russia. It is in Europe's interest to defend finite European frontiers.

The Framework for a Dormant NATO: Time Frame for U.S. Burden-Shifting

The United States should start orienting toward a fixed timeline of burden-shifting

within NATO and undertake a more detached "offshore balancing" approach.

An offshore balancing strategy would entail the United States serving as a logistics provider of last resort and the final guarantor of free sea lanes and trade routes. It would require a limited American naval and air presence in Europe to support these missions. Since Britain and France are historical allies with independent nuclear deterrents, it is in America's interest to maintain closer security relations with these nations than the rest of Europe. A Dormant NATO would mean that all other structures and local defense costs would be the Europeans' responsibility.

The United States had to offset ammunition losses during NATO missions in Libya in 2011 for the same reason that it is still outproducing and outsupplying NATO and the EU countries in Ukraine. The cause of this imbalance is not a capability gap but a deliberate European strategy of free-riding. Europeans will never take their defense duties seriously until the United States is not there to break the glass in case of a sudden fire.

It is, therefore, in the interest of the Europeans to not only scale up their munitions production but also maintain uniformity with American arms. This would enable the United States to be an effective logistics provider of last resort and preserve the opportunity for Europe to purchase arms and munitions from American producers.

The NATO bureaucracy is a barrier to reduced American commitment. It is self-sustaining and prone to push missions that are beyond NATO's core role and at times opposed to the domestic interests of the United States. Radically reducing the size of the NATO bureaucracy should be a top priority.

The United States is the largest funder of NATO by virtue of having the largest GNP among its members. The fund is usually divided into the civil budget, the military budget, and investment. There are currently more than one thousand civilian international staff members within NATO, and the alliance routinely creates nonprofit institutions in member countries that aim to maintain support for NATO membership. NATO bureaucrats regularly opine on political issues, either about adversaries or about the domestic policies of allied nations. The United States—specifically Congress through the appropriations process—should stop funding this political grandstanding, which often undermines America's national interest.

A Dormant NATO would mean a complete moratorium on activities that do not fall within a strictly military remit and maintenance of only organizational structures that would be needed and activated in the case of a major war.

NATO should also stop all expansion. A bloc that is constantly mutating cannot have a coherent grand strategy. NATO does not serve the overall defense of the bloc. It undermines national interest (even mild forms of benevolent nationalism and prioritization of member states), especially in the hegemon, through its ever-expanding, self-sustaining Soviet-lite bureaucracy and foreign lobby groups. It encourages protectorates to influence the domestic and foreign policy of great powers. It results in free-riding and strategic chaos. NATO's shift from a defense alliance into an ideological bureaucracy urgently needs to be reversed, and a finite border for the bloc is the primary prerequisite.

Eventually, the likely creation of mini ententes between various local powers and balancers may eliminate the need for a NATO-like transatlantic alliance altogether. Accordingly, the United States government should never take a full withdrawal from NATO off the table. Policymakers should also be prepared to pursue this option, especially if NATO's European members do not make substantial efforts to achieve a burden shift.

Europeans Guarding the European Frontier

European powers are more than capable of guarding Europe's frontiers. NATO's rapid response force is on track to expand. Still, it would be prudent to man the force purely with European infantry and logistics under a European command within NATO.

NATO should immediately stop out-of-area operations, and the European members of NATO should guard European frontiers and landmasses. Germany or the Netherlands sending occasional frigates to the Pacific in no way enhances Asian security or indicates a better burden-sharing. European frigates patrolling the Baltic Sea are a better use of scant resources.

The Scandinavian countries are more than capable of providing Arctic security and signals intelligence and patrolling the Bering, Mediterranean, and Baltic Seas. The Swedish navy's subsurface capabilities are among the best in the world. France and Greece are already inking defense management of the Mediterranean under their bilateral defense pact. Similarly, there are Polish–British security arrangements and talks of the German army being permanently stationed in Lithuania. While these initiatives are in their early stages, they provide opportunities for the United States to partially retrench.

After the degradation of Russian conventional forces, there is no need for the United States to deploy any armored infantry or combat support units to Eastern Europe. All infantry brigades and logistics permanently deployed in Eastern Europe should be European in combination and command. Poland is on its way to becoming the largest European NATO force after Turkey. Finland has large infantry reserves, and Germany can resume its Cold War–era role as NATO's armored backbone.

Step-by-Step Mechanics of Burden-Shifting

A Dormant NATO doctrine would give a fixed timeline for the removal of the conventional power of the United States based in Europe. Accordingly, all American artillery, armor, and infantry should eventually move out of Europe. A first step would require a pullback of troops deployed to Europe by President Biden after the war in Ukraine. Next there would be a more

deliberate pullback of the "permanently" stationed conventional forces in Germany, Italy, the Balkans, and elsewhere. These efforts will take more time and money because of the relocation of dependents and handover of major bases, but they will save money in the long run. There is already a template for shrinking American forces, from a peak of over three hundred thousand to around sixty in a span of five years, found in the reorganization following the collapse of the USSR.

Under a Dormant NATO arrangement, nuclear forces and supporting Air Force assets would be retained in Germany and Turkey, and the Second and Sixth Fleets would remain dedicated to the Atlantic defense. But the rest of U.S. conventional forces would be transferred to continental America, Arctic bases in Greenland, or the Pacific stations. The withdrawal could be extended or precipitous, depending on negotiations and global events, but it must be completed.

Not all activities and organizational structures are conducive to NATO's purpose of protection during a defensive war and therefore should be sustained in a Dormant NATO scenario. But it is in the United States' national interest to maintain interoperability of forces with European allies. A Dormant NATO should keep uniform standards for ammunition (5.56, 7.62, and 120 mm for tanks; 155 mm for artillery, etc.) to enable the United States to be the logistics provider of last resort. Standards for tanks, satellite imagery, and other equipment should remain uniform. The focus should remain on defensive weapons such as anti-aircraft units, surface-to-air missiles, and drone defense technologies, as seen in the Ukraine conflict. To these ends, some U.S. participation in defensive joint NATO exercises would be expected to continue, led by European forces.

It is imperative that the United States retain control of the ultimate nuclear escalation threshold in the European continent and discourage any nuclear proliferation. These have been foreign policy aims of the U.S. government since the dawn of the nuclear age. NATO's nuclear command, accordingly, would remain solely in the hands of the United States, with special structures and agreements maintained with regards to Britain and France's nuclear arsenals and potential allied delivery of weapons in a crisis. While a Dormant NATO would push European states to lead their own conventional defense, there must be no further nuclear proliferation among member states. America would remain treaty-bound to be the ultimate guarantor of nuclear deterrence for European states.

Crucially, NATO's Article 5 must be acknowledged not to supersede Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution. Article 5 does not automatically oblige the United States to take up the entire burden for Europe's security; it merely brings NATO together to discuss a joint course of action in the case of its invocation. The only time Article 5 was invoked, after the 9/11 attacks, member states came together to do just that, but the number of troops and contributions were left to the individual member states themselves. A similar principle applies in reverse: If there is a land war in Europe,

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it is primarily Europe's responsibility to provide the bulk of the manpower and resources and the United States' responsibility to provide external support and nuclear deterrence. It goes against the Founders' vision for America to be more willing and enthusiastic to provide manpower for Europe than Europe itself. If there were to be a nuclear war scenario over Europe, however, America is treaty-bound and interested in eliminating a nuclear threat.

That said, mutually assured destruction and general deterrence, or the nuclear lid on conflict, appears still to hold, as most recently restated by NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, so the threat of failed deterrence in Europe outside NATO is primarily conventional, not nuclear. Balancing Russia conventionally does not require U.S. forward deployment; a united Europe is overwhelmingly stronger than Russia. Russian provocations in the Baltics can be deterred by positioning European forces, as well as by police and counterintelligence operations. While interoperability of the member states would be maintained, should a conventional attack occur, the United States—prepared to act as a backstop of last resort—would expect the European states to lead in providing troops, fighter aircraft, and other materiel.

NATO's Core Security Interests and Europe's Defense Capabilities

The European theater's current front lies in the east, along the border with Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. Russia is a revisionist power—its interests contradict the status quo and American-led liberal international order—but it has limited conventional and regional capabilities, which can be checked by European rearmament and local alignments produced under the Dormant NATO framework. Russian capabilities, national interests, and known political intentions make a total confrontation with the NATO alliance likely. Under pressure, Europe has the industrial and financial capacity to build ground, air, and naval forces to effectively cover its front and flanks, especially considering Russian financial, manpower, and military limitations as revealed in the Ukraine conflict (in addition to its lack of an official alliance system of its own such as the Warsaw Pact). Consequently, there should be minimal concern about an overt Russian military action against a NATO member state, although Russia may seek to foment a regional internal crisis within the Baltics. That is a threat to be quelled by policing actions, primarily by European troops either stationed or patrolling the region, not by a general war.

NATO's flanks are the Arctic and the Mediterranean. In the Arctic, chances of a violent conflict are minimal, so the primary threat is Russian and Chinese intelligence-gathering because the Europeans, notably Finland, Sweden, and Germany, are Arctic powers and the United States has a major base in Greenland. The southern flank's core threat is mass migration from North Africa. Neither of these problems requires American military power to address. European rearmament and counterintelligence operations can secure the European Arctic. The Mediterranean is a political question.

Mass migration cannot be addressed without changing local welfare state incentives, alongside targeting human traffickers, sinking their boats, defunding NGOs, and taking strict legal action against anyone aiding and abetting the transportation of people. Europe will have to raze the current human rights regime and asylum system and, as an added deterrence measure, implement deportations. These are political and economic questions for Europe to answer, and they do not require American military assistance. Europe's rear is guarded by the American, French, and British fleets. There are no major seaborne threats in that theater, and American naval operations guarantee its security apart from the activities of NATO.

In summary, Russia is a regional threat, which can be balanced by European rearmament, policing, counterintelligence, and patrolling in Eastern Europe. So the interests of European NATO member states are in tension with the American national interest in this area. NATO's expansion has increased the risk of a general conflict with Russia, which is contrary to America's interest: a strategic equilibrium and the maintenance of a stable balance of power on the Eurasian landmass. Western European states benefited from NATO's expansion because it pushed NATO's eastern flank farther away from their national borders, creating a buffer between them and their major strategic threat, Russia. Newly added Eastern European states of course benefited from the security guarantees of membership in NATO.

None of this expansion was in the United States' concrete interest, and it was encouraged for misguided ideological reasons, often as part of an aspirational "democratic peace." More specifically, the continued expansion of NATO further tied the United States to the European continent and consolidated America's role as the primary guarantor of European security. This has enabled and incentivized Britain, Germany, and France—the other three traditional candidates for regional great power status, along with Russia—to drastically underinvest in their own defense, undermining the balance of power that would exist without the American backstop. The expansion of NATO diluted the alliance's decision-making process and increased the potential defense burden, thereby reducing the utility of the alliance to America. Regardless of their lofty rhetoric, the major Western European member states have all sought to pass the buck of their security burden to the United States.

Another aspect of this issue is the question of whether NATO should be a factor in a potential Sino-American conflict. The answer is that NATO should not be a factor in the American pivot to the Indo-Pacific, which is a major reason why Europe should have a larger role in the alliance. The pressing national interest prompting the United States to maintain a presence in Europe is not conventional military balance, which is currently stable, but maintaining trade and financial security alignment. The EU's joining a China-led economic sphere would potentially remove another major market for American firms; thankfully, the reverse holds true as well, such that Europe would likely retain an interest in trade with the United States even should political relations deteriorate.

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The best-case scenario for European–American relations during a general war in Asia or the Pacific is one in which the European powers have stepped up to take the primary role in securing their own continent. In this scenario, the United States would have succeeded in pulling back from the continent to free up assets for an Indo-Pacific conflict that previously were tied down in Europe. The worst-case scenario for a Sino-American war is one in which the United States is still too tied up in Europe and in which Europeans buckle to Chinese pressure to actually prevent the United States from moving assets from NATO to the Pacific or from using European-based facilities to support the war effort. The latter dynamic has been repeatedly visible in the Middle East recently.

It is unlikely that the United States will withdraw fully from NATO, but given the current geopolitical trends, it would be imprudent not to contemplate that possibility. A member state that picks war with Russia, inviting retaliation, would void the protection of Article 5. The election of governments in NATO member states that actively seek a conflict with Russia and agitate for one might in an extreme scenario warrant an American withdrawal. Recent calls by some European powers to send regular troops, rather than advisors, to Ukraine could be seen as one such reckless escalation should they become reality. Such a mobilization would mark a formal entry into the conflict and a repudiation of NATO's defensive character. The refusal of Germany, France, or other large members of NATO to adequately fund their defense or their public resistance to the transition to a Dormant NATO posture could lead to a situation where, as Defense Secretary Robert Gates once warned, a future generation of Americans might not find it in the interest of the United States to continue to subsidize Europe's defense, a view that eventually could lead to the United States' full withdrawal from NATO. This possibility includes any new promises made to expand NATO, in particular promises of accession to Ukraine and Georgia. Active potential interference in U.S. electoral politics by NATO governments, including taking sides in domestic debates on American foreign policy, might lead to not only withdrawal from the alliance but sanctions on guilty member states.

Before China's recent military initiatives, no great power in history had simultaneously embarked on a rapid buildup of both offensive capabilities—in this instance, China's People's Liberation Army Navy—and deterrence capabilities, in this instance, China's nuclear warheads. So, it is reasonable to expect that China is planning for a war. One might disagree on the strategy for either containing China or buck-passing the security burden, but those who refuse to treat relations with China as a grand-strategic challenge that needs some prioritization of resources make a strategic failure in planning. American intelligence reports also conclude that Beijing, for all practical purposes, is preparing for some sort of conflict in the next couple of decades. Prioritization of strategic theaters is the key to grand strategy and

inevitably leads to trade-offs.

There are two logical ways to offset the China threat: first, a Euro–Atlantic pivot to Asia with NATO patrolling the Pacific, and second, the establishment of a relatively self-sufficient Europe and a burden-shifting so that the United States, along with its Pacific allies such as Japan and Australia, can focus on balancing the rise of China. The first will not happen. An occasional lone German frigate in the Indo-Pacific as a solidarity gesture notwithstanding, it is foolish to divide resources in such a way. Western Europeans have different interests from the east and will continue to take advantage of American engagement in Europe to free-ride, despite occasional rhetorical solidarity with the United States. A much more prudent strategy would be to force Europe to be defended by the Europeans with the United States providing only naval backup and serving as a logistics provider of last resort wile itself reorienting towards Asia. Western Europe will not take the continent's defense seriously as long as Uncle Sam is there to assure its total protection.

Despite repeated warnings and frustrations, decisions to the contrary are political, not material or structural. Pursuing a Dormant NATO strategy that allows the United States to shift the security burden to Europe rapidly must be one of the U.S. government's highest priorities.

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Addressing Future European Concerns and European Strategy Breakdowns

Realists on the American right face a theoretical contradiction. America is functionally an empire but designed as a republic, and this discourages the formation of a rational grand strategy. This is not an original observation. No conservative realist grand strategy of the United States should omit a discussion of the founder of the academic realist school of thought in the United States, Hans Morgenthau. Any discussion about a European posture should also start with the discussion of core American interests in Europe.

Immediately after the Second World War, Morgenthau wrote, "We have conceived the two wars which we fought essentially as two holy crusades, engaged in by a good people against an evil one. It so happened, that what was really at stake in those crusades was not at all the extirpation of evil of its own sake, but the restoration of the balance of power in Europe." He continued, "Without knowing it, we followed the course which has been charted by Washington, Hamilton, and Jefferson, a course which Great Britain had followed for more than four centuries. From the beginning of the Republic, we have always regarded the dominance of Europe by one single power as a threat to the security of the United States, and however sentimentality and utopianism may have distorted the stark facts of this power situation and of this power interest, we have pursued this interest under the guise of crusading ideologies."[1]

These ideologies are no mere abstractions: They provide a set of policy principles when applied to real events. The United States is primarily a maritime great power, and it is in its interest to oppose any continental hegemony in the European mainland. The logic is simple but profound. A European hegemony—one flag and army ruling the entirety of Europe—is a risky proposition for the survival of the United States. A hegemon, once formed, would have enormous land depth to fall back on and could draw the United States into a total war of attrition, making the military conquest of the entire continent difficult during an extreme crisis.

Even barring a violent conflict, the hegemon would have enormous trade surplus, production capacity, and manpower to challenge and potentially dominate the United States. A hegemon would have ample trade power alone or in combination with China and Russia to challenge American prosperity and erode the primacy of the dollar and the power of sanctions, the

1. Hans J. Morgenthau, "Germany, the Political Problem," in *Germany and the Future of Europe* (University of Chicago Press, 1950).

United States' tools of global preponderance. Any European hegemony would have second-order consequences for American safety even in the Western Hemisphere.

The United States has opposed any scenario that might result in a hegemony in Europe, both in the early republic days with hard-edged realism and protectionism and after the Second World War with institutionalism and great power atrophy, as Morgenthau outlined. American grand strategy has always been to ensure that no European power can challenge the United States in the Western Hemisphere and no Asian power can challenge the United States in the east. The United States isn't designed to be an empire and thus lacks an imperial structure and elite. It is a proud republic, egalitarian and at least aspirationally meritocratic. It also naturally suffers from the whims of public passions, as Morgenthau outlined in his 1946 book *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics.* Empires can overextend themselves and engage in unnecessary imperial intervention and exploitation in foreign territories. But in times of stress, they can also retrench or prioritize a lot faster than a democratic republic can, as their "decision structure" can behave rationally and with restraint under duress.

The rational grand strategy of a great power is incompatible with democratic passions, Morgenthau said, and democratic republics from ancient Athens onward have always encountered that strategic incoherence and incompatibility. This same incoherence is apparent in American strategic inclinations in Europe.

So the United States would likely oppose a consolidated European Union or a European empire. The American public would not tolerate their country's having a secondary status to a potentially independent European superpower; nor would the U.S. elite, at least for the near foreseeable future, regardless of its constant displeasure at the "burden of hegemony" and worries about overspending in Europe.

Until 2008, the United States and Europe shared comparable GDP and technology, but that is no longer the case. A variety of forces, including social conservatism and far-right nationalism, has fragmented Europe, and accordingly the probability of a European hegemony or even European consolidation is exceedingly low. If there were ever a push for European imperialism, all America would have to do would be to play the forces against each other. European peace is an artificial construct and a result of American hegemony, and Europe has a penchant for regulation and internal division. Thus, the chance of a European split is greater than the risk of European consolidation.

The major external hegemonic challenge to Europe comes from American retrenchment leading to Russian and Chinese predation. Russia is militarily incapable of hegemony over Europe. It currently faces challenges in pacifying a fifth of Ukraine. European manpower and GDP dwarf those of Russia. And the only way China will have control of Europe is if Europe would consolidate under the EU and throw its weight against the United States.

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Euro-American Alignment

The Euro-American relationship remains solid despite recent hostility, especially after Vice President J. D. Vance's speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2025. The United States institutionalized peace in the continent through NATO, and that resulted in a natural asymmetry of interest. In the absence of any direct strategic threat to their homelands, the Western European powers began to free-ride on the United States because of the expansion of NATO and the European Union's idea of a continuously expanding, united, and free Europe. Germany's atrophy from 1989 to today was a result of the German frontiers' gradual eastward movement, with American troops being placed between Germany and Russia. Berlin is now encountering difficulties in equipping a brigade in the Baltics.

Likewise, the atrophy of the Western European powers indicates that, despite their lofty rhetoric regarding the dangers of democracy, they do not genuinely fear a Russian hegemony nor are they willing to replace the United States in Europe, as is evident from their failure to rearm. Conversely, the Eastern European states are rightfully apprehensive about the intention and capability of their more powerful and larger western neighbors to protect them and have legitimate concerns about a revanchist imperial power to their east. The Baltic states in particular rely heavily on the United States per their doctrine, as discussed earlier. Their strategic documents consistently underscore their dedication to the United States' continued involvement in the security of Europe and their fundamental interest in the expansion of NATO and the EU.

Their logic is sound. NATO's ongoing expansion and the acceptance of new members further democratized the alliance, resulting in the hegemon's diminution of relative power. As the number of members increases, strategic disarray and incoherence become more prevalent. The consequences of expanding an alliance such as NATO include the establishment of a self-sustaining bureaucracy; the consolidation of the already entrenched liberal internationalist orthodoxy; and the difficulty for any nation-state, including the hegemon, to act in its restricted and restrained national interest.

In other words, the enlarged NATO bureaucracy and the Eastern European protectorates benefit from Russo-American friction. It is logical that this friction would increase should additional states be incorporated.

What Should Europe Do?

This unnatural arrangement is becoming increasingly unsustainable for the United States to maintain due to the structural pressures it exerts. The American public is concerned about European nation-building, liberal interventionism, free-riding, and conflicts of choice. The rise of China has brought the American strategic community together in an unprecedented way. China's dollar-proofing, naval buildup, nuclear buildup, storage of food cereals, and purchase of gold and medications suggest the

possibility of a limited bid for hegemony in Asia, which could potentially disrupt the Indo-Pacific order.

The election and popularity of President Donald Trump, who, in the words of Henry Kissinger, is "one of those figures in history who appears from time to time to mark the end of an era and to force it to give up its pretenses," are closely related to the electorate's growing preference for retrenchment, the rise of a peer rival in the east, and the decline in relative power of the United States.[2] The Trump administration, like any previous administration, is highly susceptible to internal deliberations and strategic debates. As a result, the debate concerning Europe remains unresolved. Nevertheless, its contours are visible. It is fortunate that a burden-shifting posture is accessible.

In order to change the current posture, the United States would need to begin by reversing the "institutionalism" in Europe that it has promoted for more than half a century. The imposed equilibrium has led to Western Europe's free-riding on the United States and Eastern Europe's chain-ganging the United States to its ethnic rivalries. This strategy has been effective, but it is no longer suitable. Now that the European Union has been strategically marginalized as an entity, a new security architecture in Europe needs to be established. That new alignment should entail bilateral grand negotiations between the United States and the powerful states of Western Europe, particularly Germany.

Second, in order to prevent perpetual engagement, the United States should return to its role as an "offshore balancer." This shift would transfer all conventional burdens to the natural balancers of the European continent: the affluent and influential states of Western Europe, particularly Germany. The transfer of troops is a presidential prerogative, and it is possible to bypass Congress. A complete withdrawal from NATO is neither necessary nor advisable at this time, as it is not legally feasible without a congressional treaty amendment. Third, the United States should actively advocate for a certain level of strategic autonomy in Europe with regard to procurement, research and development, technology transfer, weapons acquisition, substrategic troop formation, logistical and divisional commands, interoperability, and coordination.

The United States should also encourage the organic development of mini ententes and the establishment of a diverse array of natural equilibriums, including Franco-Turkic, Greco-British, British–Polish, and German–Lithuanian relations. Finally, the United States should make a concerted effort to establish a negative equilibrium in Europe. This would address the concerns of European states and appease some of Russia's legitimate natural interests in its near abroad. The United States should veto and obstruct any further expansion of NATO in order to demonstrate good faith to Moscow.

Nevertheless, the United States' extended

2. Edward Luce, "Henry Kissinger: 'We Are in a Very, Very Grave Period,'" *Financial Times*, July 20, 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/926a66b0-8b49-11e8-bf9e-8771d5404543.

aegis should be guaranteed to be in place for the foreseeable future, at the very least by the robust U.S. naval presence in the form of the Second Fleet, as well as U.S. strategic command and nuclear weaponry in Germany, located in the heart of Europe. This arrangement would offer a stable new approach and calm nerves in European capitals. In the near future, extended deterrence would continue to exist in Europe, thereby preventing nuclear proliferation and ensuring that the United States maintains control over the threshold of nuclear escalation. Still, operational adjustments in posture may require the reduction of warheads and the relocation of strategic weapons outside of Europe. The United States can attain second-tier deterrence and instantaneous second strike capability by encouraging both Britain and France to maintain their assets under European command. The United States also may rely on patrolling subsurface deterrence, as opposed to static deterrence, the latter of which includes warheads that are deployed in Europe. Washington could offer support in the coordination of this process, but Europe would be accountable for determining how to distribute the burden among its citizens.

Under the offshoring balance posture, only two countries may be deemed strategic necessities for a U.S. presence in order to achieve the aforementioned "minimum credible deterrence." Turkey and Germany are the most critical strategic assets of the United States in continental Europe. Turkey is the second most powerful member of NATO and a natural historical balancer of Russia in the Black Sea, Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean. The United States' presence in Turkey functions as a strategic base for deterrence in the Mediterranean and North Africa. Yet the United States' sole relationship in Europe that is genuinely unique is with Germany.

The Real Special Relationship: Germany Rising

The German government has recently expressed its intention to resume the draft, establish the largest conventional force in Europe, and respond to the American demand for 5 percent of GDP in defense expenditure. It has also suggested a historic debt relief. The United States' presence in Germany, which is centrally located in Europe, can provide extended nuclear deterrence throughout the continent. Retrenchment from the residual bases in Europe is not as critical for the United States to maintain and occupy Europe in times of war. This retrenchment could result in the deployment of personnel to the Arctic (Greenland) or the Pacific. Although the United States maintains bases in Germany and Turkey and upholds a broad consensus and duopoly between Germany and the United States regarding the continent's orientation, it should not be the Americans' responsibility to micromanage any other natural tactical alignments that occur in Europe.

Between 1993 and 1996, a template for the swift withdrawal of American personnel was created. In response to a rapid drawdown this time, Western European states will be encouraged to promptly rearm and return to their pre-1990 force posture. The

United States' nuclear umbrella will prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons on the continent, a perpetual and essential American objective that has persisted since the conclusion of World War II. These modifications would preserve extended nuclear deterrence and send a message to Russia that attempts are being made to establish a genuine detente and a new paradigm. As a result, Europe's anxieties would be soothed. Simultaneously, the United States should promote the establishment of additional trilateral discussions regarding strategic nuclear limitation with China and Russia. Diplomacy and deterrence can be integrated to foster peace on the continent.

Practical considerations are the foundation of the United States' special relationship with Germany in Europe. "The nation that has the capacity to control all of Germany, of all the three Germanies, has gained such an advantage in the struggle for power as a result of Germany's natural endowment that it may have become invincible in a shooting war," Morgenthau wrote.[3] The Soviet Union must deny the United States control of all of Germany, and the United States must deny the Soviet Union control of all of Germany for the same reason, he added. The Cold War in Europe was distinguished by its simple logic: "Our primary goal is to prevent the Russians from gaining an advantage from the German reinforcements and to improve our capabilities in the conflict with the Soviet Union." That reality continues to exist. Germany remains the focal point of European influence, economy, and industry. In international relations, a great power does not need another power to "buck-pass" in order to capture the buck, but it is advantageous.

Vice President Vance's speech in Munich in February served as a wake-up call for Germany to recognize its leadership role in Europe. The policies established by War Secretary Pete Hegseth and Under Secretary Elbridge Colby suggest that the United States is inclined to endorse that scenario. Based on the clamor emanating from Berlin, it appears that Germany has finally woken up.

In 1945, another Morgenthau asserted that the United States was accountable for the administration of Germany. Henry Morgenthau Jr. declared in the Morgenthau Plan that "war factories must be dismantled or converted to peacetime production."[4] He also observed that "the United States has demonstrated the speed with which these factories can be converted back and the extent to which basic production is the same for peace or war." Now is the appropriate time to formally rescind this policy. A new security architecture in Europe and a new grand bargain with Germany would lead to a more positive relationship between continental Europe and a partially retrenched United States that is increasingly focused on its peer-rival in the Asia-Pacific. The United States would no longer pursue a comprehensive spectrum of primacy in the European theater and would allow for European rearmament and

3. Morgenthau, "Germany, the Political Problem."
4. Henry Morgenthau Jr., *Germany Is Our Problem* (Harper & Brothers, 1945).

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tactical independence. A strong European component within NATO, led by a rearmed Germany, and a special relationship with a strong and independent Germany shouldering much of the conventional security burden of Europe is not something the United States should be wary of or discourage; there is the potential for an immense benefit to the United States.

A New Security Architecture

"Our transatlantic alliance has endured for decades. And we fully expect that it will be sustained for generations to come. But this won't just happen," Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said during a speech in Brussels in February 2025. He added that "it will require our European allies to step into the arena and take ownership of conventional security on the continent." This point was echoed by Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby: "Germany is Europe's largest economy, with a history of major contributions to NATO collective defense during the Cold War. It is vital and justified that Germany step up and lead in Europe's conventional defense. . . . This includes accelerating the buildup of European conventional forces, capabilities, and industries to enable Europe to assume primary responsibility for its own conventional defense." He continued, "Our NATO allies taking primary responsibility for Europe's conventional defense is vital and as it is overdue...This is how we can restore and sustain peace through strength in Europe for the coming generations."

Shifting the burden of conventional defense to Europe both in combination and command is now an officially stated policy and aim of the United States government.[1] The Trump administration has started to signal a shift in its grand strategy in Europe, as declared by both the secretary and the under secretary. This move aligns with the pillar of the Dormant NATO doctrine that Europe needs to shoulder the burden of conventional security. It is also a clear guideline for Europeans about American grand strategy in Europe. A total burden-shifting in certain domains, especially in conventional security, such as logistics, infantry, armor, and intelligence, would mean that Europe would have responsibility in combination and command, with the United States maintaining doctrinal and operational supremacy over more strategic platforms and naval and nuclear power. The United States' strategy for over eighty years of discouraging nuclear proliferation would remain intact. It is a sound policy because it keeps the United States engaged in European politics and its balance of power while discouraging overstretch and free-riding and satiating populist forces within the United States.

1. See Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, opening remarks, Ukraine Defense Contact Group, Brussels, Belgium, February 12, 2025, https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4064113/opening-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-at-ukraine-defense-contact/; Under Secretary of War Elbridge Colby (@USDPColby), "This includes accelerating the buildup of European conventional forces, capabilities, and industries to enable Europe to assume primary responsibility for its own conventional defense. 3/3," X, May 6, 2025 (archived), https://archive.ph/I4Mc8#selection-613.0-613,188; and Under Secretary of War Elbridge Colby (@USDPColby), "'Our NATO allies taking primary responsibility for Europe's conventional defense is vital and as it is overdue...This is how we can restore and sustain peace through strength in Europe for the coming generations.' 9/," X, June 10, 2025 (archived), https://archive.ph/Nm8cZ#selection-613.0-613.216.

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There have been several debates about the Dormant NATO posture. Two important ones deserve special mention in light of the new direction of American foreign policy in Europe. Phillips P. O'Brien and Edward Stringer in *Foreign Affairs* and Sten Rynning in *HDiplo* deserve special mention for their detailed engagement with the posture of Dormant NATO.[2] Their arguments can be summarized as follows: First, NATO wouldn't survive any U.S. retrenchment, however small. Second, Europe will have to become hegemonic, either under a European Union hegemony or under an individual power such as Poland. Third, any U.S. retrenchment would result in more, not less, great power rivalry and predatory annexations in Europe, most likely from Russia. Fourth, foreign policy is about not just interest but also values. Fifth, NATO was always an ideological alliance, and its promotion of democracy isn't new.

All of these contentions are flawed, as demonstrated in earlier chapters. The idea that NATO wouldn't survive any retrenchment of the United States is mistaken, as there was a previous drawdown of forces, rapidly and in massive numbers, immediately after the Cold War. The idea that either the EU will have to become supranational or will have one or two hegemonic powers within it is contradictory on its face. Europe cannot be united; it is an artificial construct, and the only reason behind its continued existence is American presence. Without U.S. involvement, one can contend, the EU would split along its historic divisions, which is perhaps what the authors fear. The idea that there would be more predation in the European continent without the United States is an argument for more, not less, European rearmament, as contingency might push the United States out to Asia, leaving the Europeans empty-handed. Russia is also, as is evident in Ukraine, unable to be a hegemonic threat.

Foreign policy is most definitely about both values and interests. But theoretical abstractions shouldn't trump geographical interest; that is neither prudential nor realistic. The American founding fathers were serious about disentangling from permanent alliances for a reason. Finally, NATO in its original form included Salazar's Portugal and Turkey and Greece under a junta. It was not quite a bastion of democracy. In fact, NATO's original intention had nothing to do with democracy but rather was geared towards deterring control of Europe by one hegemon.

Dormant NATO provides for a posture that manages engagement in Europe with European rearmament while avoiding American overstretch and insolvency. A German rearmament wouldn't lead to a new Third Reich, or a Russian regional war to a return to the dark days of Stalin's control of Eastern Europe. It would simply lead to the force posture and defense spending of Western Europe in 1989 so that the Unit-

2. Phillips P. O'Brien and Edward Stringer, "Planning for a Post-American NATO," *Foreign Affairs*, September 6, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/europe/planning-post-american-nato; Sten Rynning, Article Review 174, *HDiplo*, June 11, 2025, https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/JAR-174.pdf. For a response to the former, see Sumantra Maitra, "The Best NATO Is a Dormant NATO," *Foreign Affairs*, November 4, 2024, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/europe/best-nato-dormant-nato.

ed States can act as an offshore balancer. Washington should stop striving for total primacy in the European theater and rather facilitate the rearmament of Europe and promote equitable burden-sharing. As I wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, any partial U.S. retrenchment would undoubtedly be met with disapproval from Europeans.[3] But NATO's members would ultimately benefit from a dormant organization. The United States would have an easier time ensuring European peace and unity with its dominant nuclear and naval might if Europe would more equitably distribute the burden of logistics, armor, intelligence, and infantry. NATO would eventually evolve into a defensive, minimalist, and closed organization, as its architects had intended.

It is cliché to conclude with an appeal to the founding documents of the United States, but throughout history there has been a steady instinct in American foreign policy of preponderance coupled with humility and restraint. From George Washington's Farewell Address to John Quincy Adams's 1821 State of the Union address, opposing permanent alliances abroad has been the key to American grand strategy. Add to that James Madison's recommendation of "divide et impera" as a prudent guideline for any republican policy and Thomas Jefferson's idea of commerce and trade with all but permanence with none and one can see that the foundational principles of foreign policy in this country encourage balance and restraint. Washington, Ulysses S. Grant, and Teddy Roosevelt also preemptively announced "proclamations of neutrality" in conflicts where there were no American interests, a practice that has declined in recent years. A Dormant NATO would continue that tradition.

If President Donald Trump and his administration attempt to return to the first principles of an actually practicing a "commerce not chaos" republican foreign policy, one that refuses any permanent alliances, a Dormant NATO would be a good place to start.

3. Maitra, "The Best NATO."

A Letter from Eric

The Center for Renewing America is proud to present its flagship foreign policy doctrine Dormant NATO in this booklet. The doctrine was coined in 2023 and has been debated on the pages and forums of *Foreign Affairs*, *The New York Times*, European Council on Foreign Relations, European Union Institute for Security Studies, *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, German Council on Foreign Relations, Cato Institute, Brookings, Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Politico*, *Rolling Stone*, Stimson Center, and various European and American universities. This booklet provides a comprehensive outline for a true America First "burden-shifting" to Europe. It is meant for historians, practitioners, and scholars, as well as for general readers.

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